

# INTERNATIONAL TALES - MAY 2024



*Mrs. Duckworth*, by Julia Margaret Cameron, Metropolitan Museum, Internet Archive

## **GENTIAN<sup>1</sup>**

by Mary Wilkins Freeman  
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*BEST STORIES OF MARY E. WILKINS*

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IT had been raining hard all night ; when the morning

dawned clear everything looked vivid and unnatural. The wet leaves on the trees and hedges seemed to emit a real green light of their own; the tree trunks were black and dank, and the spots of moss on them stood out distinctly. A tall old woman was coming quickly up the street. She had on a stiffly starched calico gown, which sprang and rattled as she walked. She kept smoothing it anxiously. "Gittin' every mite of the stiff'nin' out," she muttered to herself.

She stopped at a long cottage house, whose unpainted walls, with white window facings, and wide sweep of shingled roof, looked dark and startling through being sodden with rain.

There was a low stone wall by way of fence, with a gap in it for a gate.

She had just passed through this gap when the house door opened and a woman put out her head.

"Is that you, Hannah?" said she.

"Yes, it's me." She laid a hard emphasis on the last word; then she sighed heavily.

"Hadn't you better hold your dress up comin' through that wet grass, Hannah? You'll git it all bedraggled."

"I know it. I'm a-gittin' every mite of the stiff'nin' out on't. I worked half the forenoon ironin' on't yesterday, too. Well, I thought I'd got to git over here an' fetch a few of these fried cakes. I thought mebbe Alferd would

relish 'em fur his breakfast; an' he'd got to have 'em while they was hot; they ain't good fur nothin' cold; an' I didn't hev a soul to send-never do. How is Alferd this mornin', Lucy?"

"Bout the same, I guess."

"Ain't had the doctor yit?"

"No." She had a little, patient, pleasant smile on her face, looking up at her questioner.

The women were sisters. Hannah was Hannah Orton, unmarried. Lucy was Mrs. Tollet. Alfred was her sick husband.

Hannah's long, sallow face was deeply wrinkled. Her wide mouth twisted emphatically as she talked.

"Well, I know one thing; ef he was my husband he'd hev a doctor."

Mrs. Tollet's voice was old, but there was a childish tone in it, a sweet, uncertain pipe.

"No, you couldn't make him, Hannah; you couldn't, no more'n me. Alferd was allers jest so. He ain't never thought nothin' of doctors, nor doctors' stuff."

"Well, I'd make him take somethin'. In my opinion he needs somethin' bitter." She screwed her mouth as if the bitter morsel were on her own tongue.

"Lor' ! he wouldn't take it, you know, Hannah."

"He'd hev to. Gentian would be good fur him. "

"He wouldn't tech it."

"I'd make him, ef I put it in his tea unbeknownst to him."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare to!"

"Land! I guess I'd dare to. Ef folks don't know enough to take what's good fur ' em, they'd orter be made to by hook or crook. I don't believe in deceivin' generally, but I don't believe the Lord would hev let folks hed the faculty fur deceivin' in ' em ef it wa'n't to be used fur good sometimes. It's my opinion Alferd won't last long ef he don't hev somethin' pretty soon to strengthen of him up an' give him a start. Well, it ain't no use talkin'. I've got to git home an' put this dress in the washtub ag'in, I s'pose. I never see such a sight-jest look at that ! You'd better give Alferd those cakes afore they git cold ."

"I shouldn't wonder ef he relished 'em. You was real good to think of it, Hannah."

"Well, I'm a-goin' . Every mite of the stiff'nin's out. Sometimes it seems as ef thar wa'n't no end to the work. I didn't know how to git out this mornin', anyway." When Mrs. Tollet entered the house she found her husband in a wooden rocking-chair with a calico cushion, by the kitchen window. He was a short, large- framed old man, but he was very thin. There were great hollows in his yellow cheeks .

"What you got thar, Lucy?"

"Some griddle cakes Hannah brought."

"Griddle cakes !"

"They're real nice-lookin' ones. Don't you think you'd relish one or two, Alferd ?"

"Ef you an' Hannah want griddle cakes, you kin hev griddle cakes."

"Then you don't want to hev one, with some maple merlasses on it? They've kept hot; she hed ' em kivered up."

"Take ' em away!"

She set them meekly on the pantry shelf; then she came back and stood before her husband, gentle deprecation in her soft old face and in the whole poise of her little slender body.

"What will you hev fur breakfast, Alferd ?"

"I don' know. Well, you might as well fry a little slice of bacon, an' git a cup of tea."

"Ain't you' most afeard of-bacon, Alferd?"

"No, I ain't. Ef anybody's sick, they kin tell what they want themselves 'bout as well's anybody kin tell 'em. They don't hev any hankerin' arter anythin' unless it's good for 'em. When they need anythin', natur gives 'em a longin' arter it. I wish you'd hurry up an' cook that bacon, Lucy. I'm awful faint at my stomach."

She cooked the bacon and made the tea with no more words. Indeed, it was seldom that she used as many as she had now. Alfred Tollet, ever since she had married him, had been the sole autocrat of all her little Russias; her very thoughts had followed after him, like sheep. After breakfast she went about putting her house in order for the day. When that was done and she was ready to sit down with her sewing, she found that her husband had fallen asleep in his chair. She stood over him a minute, looking at his pale old face with the sincerest love and reverence. Then she sat down by the window and sewed, but not long. She got her bonnet and shawl stealthily and stole out of the house. She sped quickly down the village street. She was light-footed for an old woman. She slackened her pace when she reached the village store, and crept hesitatingly into the great lumbering, rank-smelling room, with its dark, newly-sprinkled floor. She bought a bar of soap; then she stood irresolute.

"Anything else this mornin', Mis' Tollet?" The proprietor himself, a narrow-shouldered, irritable man, was waiting on her. His tone was impatient. Mrs. Tollet was too absorbed to notice it. She stood hesitating.

"Is there anything else you want?"

"Well-I don't know; but-p'rhaps I'd better-hevten cents' wuth of gentian." Her very lips were white; she had an expression of frightened, guilty resolution. If she had asked for strychnine, with a view to her own bodily destruction, she would not have had a different look. The man mistook it, and his conscience smote him. He thought his manner had frightened her, but she had never noticed it.

"Goin' to give your husband some bitters?" he asked, affably, as he handed her the package.

She started and blushed. "No-I- thought some would be good fur-me."

"Well, gentian is a first-rate bitter. Good morning, Mis' Tollet."

"Good morning, Mr. Gill."

She was trembling all over when she reached her house door. There is a subtle, easily raised wind which blows spirits about like leaves, and she had come into it with her

little paper of gentian. She had hidden the parcel in her pocket before she entered the kitchen. Her husband was awake. He turned his wondering, half-recentful eyes toward her without moving his head.

"Where hev you been, Lucy?"

"I-jest went down to the store a minit, Alferd, while you was asleep. "

"What fur?"

"A bar of soap."

Alfred Tollet had always been a very healthy man until this spring. Some people thought that his illness was alarming now, more from its unwontedness and consequent effect on his mind, than from anything serious in its nature. However that may have been, he had complained of great depression and languor all the spring, and had not attempted to do any work.

It was the beginning of May now.

"Ef Alferd kin only git up May hill," Mrs. Tollet's sister had said to her, "he'll git along all right through the summer. It's a dretful tryin' time."

So up May hill, under the white apple and plum boughs, over the dandelions and the young grass, Alfred Tollet climbed, pushed and led faithfully by his loving old wife. At last he stood triumphantly on the summit of that fair  
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hill, with its sweet, wearisome ascent. When the first of June came, people said, "Alfred Tollet's a good deal better. " He began to plant a little and bestir himself.

"Alferd's out workin' in the garden," Mrs. Tollet told her sister one afternoon. She had strolled over to her house with her knitting after dinner.

"You don't say so ! Well, I thought when I see him Sunday that he was lookin' better. He's got through May, an' I guess he'll pull through. I did feel kinder worried 'bout him one spell- Why, Lucy, what's the matter ?"

"Nothin' . Why?"

"You looked at me dretful kind of queer an' distressed, I thought. "

"I guess you must hev imagined it, Hannah. Thar ain't nothin' the matter." She tried to look unconcernedly at her sister, but her lips were trembling.

"Well, I don't know 'bout it. You look kinder queer now. I guess you walked too fast comin' over here. You allers did race."

"Mebbe I did."

"For the land's sake, jest see that dust you tracked in ! I've got to git the dustpan an' brush now, an' sweep itit up."

"I'll do it."

"No; set still . I'd rather see to it myself."

As the summer went on Alfred Tollet continued to improve. He was as hearty as ever by September. But his wife seemed to lose as he gained. She grew thin, and her small face had a solemn, anxious look. She went out very little. She did not go to church at all, and she had been a devout churchgoer. Occasionally she went over to her sister's, that was all . Hannah watched her shrewdly. She was a woman who arrived at conclusions slowly ; but she never turned aside from the road to them.

"Look-a here, Lucy," she said one day, "I know what's the matter with you; thar's somethin' on your mind; an' I think you'd better out with it. "

The words seemed propelled like bullets by her vehemence. Lucy shrank down and away from them, her pitiful eyes turned up toward her sister.

"Oh, Hannah, you scare me! I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do. Do you s'pose I'm blind? You're worrying yourself to death, an' I want to know the reason why. Is it anything ' bout Alferd?"

"Yes. Don't, Hannah."

"Well, I'll go over an' give him a piece of my mind! I'll see-

"Oh, Hannah, don't ! It ain't him. It's me-it's me."

"What on airth hev you done?"

Mrs. Tollet began to sob.

"For the land sake, stop cryin' an' tell me. "

"Oh, I—give him—gentian."

"Lucy Ann Tollet, air you crazy? What ef you did give him gentian? I don't see nothin' to take on so about."

"I-deceived him, an' it's been ' most killin' me to think on't ever since."

"What do you mean?"

"I put it in his tea, the way you said."

"An' he never knew it?"

"He kinder complained ' bout its tastin' bitter, an' I told him ' twas his mouth. He asked me ef it didn't taste bitter to me, an' I said, ' No.' I don' know nothin' what's goin' to become of me. Then I had to be so keerful ' bout putting too much on't in his tea, that I was afraid he wouldn't get enough. So I put little sprinklin's on't in the bread an' pies an' everythin' I cooked. An' when he'd say nothin' tasted right nowadays, an' somehow everything was kinder

bitterish, I'd tell him it must be his mouth."

"Look here, Lucy, you didn't eat everythin' with gentian in it yourself?"

"Course I did."

"Fur the land sake!"

"I s'pose the stuff must hev done him good; he's picked right up ever since he begun takin' it. But I can't git over my deceivin' of him so. I've 'bout made up my mind to tell him."

"Well, all I've got to say is you're a big fool if you do.

I declare, Lucy Ann Tollet, I never saw sech a woman!

The idee of your worryin' over such a thing as that, when it's done Alferd good, too ! P'rhaps you'd ruther he'd died?"

"Sometimes I think I hed 'most ruther."

"Well!"

In the course of a few days Mrs. Tollet did tell her husband. He received her disclosure in precisely the way she had known that he would. Her nerves received just the shock which they were braced to meet.

They had come home from meeting on a Sunday night.

Mrs. Tollet stood before him; she had not even taken off her shawl and little black bonnet.

"Alferd," said she, "I've got somethin' to tell you; it's been on my mind a long time. I meant it all fur the best ; but I've been doin' somethin' wrong. I've been deceivin' of you. I give you gentian last spring when you was so poorly. I put little sprinklin's on't into everything you ate. An' I didn't tell the truth when I said 'twas your mouth, an' it didn't taste bitter to me."

The old man half closed his eyes, and looked at her intently; his mouth widened out rigidly. "You put a little gentian into everything I ate unbeknownst to me, did you?" said he. "H'm!"

"Oh, Alferd, don't look at me so! I meant it all fur the best. I was afeard you wouldn't git well without you hed it, Alferd. I was dretful worried about you; you didn't know nothin' about it, but I was. I laid awake nights a-worryin' an' prayin'. I know I did wrong; it wa'n't right to deceive you, but it was all along of my worryin' an' my thinkin' so much of you, Alferd . I was afeard you'd die an' leave me all alone; an'-it 'most killed me to think on't."

Mr. Tollet pulled off his boots, then pattered heavily about the house, locking the doors and making preparations for retiring. He would not speak another word to his wife

about the matter, though she kept on with her piteous little protestations.

Next morning, while she was getting breakfast, he went down to the store. The meal, a nice one—she had taken unusual pains with it—was on the table when he returned ; but he never glanced at it. His hands were full of bundles, which he opened with painstaking deliberation. His wife watched apprehensively. There was a new teapot, a pound of tea, and some bread and cheese, also a salt mackerel. Mrs. Tollet's eyes shone round and big; her lips were white. Her husband put a pinch of tea in the new teapot, and filled it with boiling water from the kettle.

"What air you a-doin' on, Alferd ?" she asked, feebly.  
"I'm jest a-goin' to make sure I hev some tea, an' somethin' to eat without any gentian in it. "  
"Oh, Alferd, I made these corn cakes on purpose, an' they air real light. They ain't got no gentian on ' em, Alferd."  
He sliced his bread and cheese clumsily, and sat down to eat them in stubborn silence.  
Mrs. Tollet, motionless at her end of the table, stared at him with an appalled look. She never thought of eating anything herself.  
After breakfast, when her husband started out to work, he pointed at the mackerel. "Don't you tech that, " said he.  
"But, Alferd—"  
"I ain't got nothin' more to say. Don't you tech it. "

Never a morning had passed before but Lucy Tollet had set her house in order; today she remained there at the kitchen table till noon, and did not put away the breakfast dishes.

Alfred came home, kindled up the fire, cooked and ate his salt mackerel imperturbably ; and she did not move or speak till he was about to go away again. Then she said, in a voice which seemed to shrink of itself, "Alferd !"  
He did not turn his head.

"Alferd, you must answer me; I'm in airnest. Don't you want me to do nothin' fur you any more? Don't you never want me to cook anything fur you ag'in?"  
"No; I'm afeard of gittin' things that's bitter."  
"I won't never put any gentian in anything ag'in, Alferd. Won't you let me git supper?"  
"No, I won't. I don't want to talk no more about it. In futur I'm a-goin' to cook my vittles myself, an' that's all thar is about it."  
"Alfred, if you don't want me to do nothin' fur you, mebbe -you'll think I ain't airnin' my own vittles ; mebbe—you'd



rather I go over to Hannah's-"

She sobbed aloud when she said that. He looked startled, and eyed her sharply for a minute. The other performer in the little melodrama which this thwarted, arbitrary old man had arranged was adopting a rôle that he had not anticipated, but he was still going to abide by his own.

"Mebbe 't would be jest as well," said he. Then he went out of the door.

Hannah Orton was in her kitchen sewing when her sister entered.

"Fur the land sake, Lucy, what is the matter?"

"I've left him-I've left Alferd ! Oh! oh!"

Lucy Tollet gasped for breath ; leaned her head against the wall.

"Don't, Lucy. There, there !" She sank into a chair and Hannah got some water. " Drink this, poor lamb ! "

She did not quite faint. She could speak in a few min-

"He bought him a new teapot this mornin', Hannah, an' some bread an' cheese and salt mackerel. He's goin' to do his own cookin' ; he don't want me to do nothin' more fur him; he's afeard I'll put gentian in it . I've left him ! I've come to stay with you!"

"You told him, then?"

"I hed to; I couldn't go on so no longer. He wouldn't let me tech that mackerel, an' it orter hev been soaked. It was salt enough to kill him."

"Serve him right ef it did."

"Hannah Orton, I ain't a-goin' to hev a thing said ag'in Alferd."

"Well, ef you want to stan' up fur Alferd Tollet, you kin.

You allers would stan' up fur him ag'in your own folks . Ef

you want to keep on carin' fur sech a miserable, set, unfeelin'-"

"Don't you say another word, Hannah-not another one ; I won't hear it."

"I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' ; thar ain't any need of your bein' so fierce. Now don't cry so, Lucy. We shell git along real nice here together. You'll get used to it arter a little while, an' you'll see you air a good deal better off without him; you've been nothin' but jest a slave ever since you was married. Don't you s'pose I've seen it ? I've pitied you so, I didn't know what to do. I've seen the time when I'd like to ha' shook Alferd."

"Don't, Hannah. "

"I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' more. an' try an' be calm, or you'll be sick. dinner?"

"I don't want none. You jest stop cryin'

Hev you hed anything to eat?"

"You've got to eat somethin', Lucy Ann Tollet. Thar ain't no sense in your givin' up so. I've got a nice little piece of lamb, an' some peas an' string beans left over, an' I'm a-goin' to get ' em. You've got to eat ' em, an' then you'll feel better. ' Look-a here, I want to know ef Alferd drove you out of the house ' cause you give him gentian? I aint' got it through my head yet."

"I asked him ef he'd ruther hev me go, an' he said mebbe 'twould be jest as well. I thought I shouldn't hev no right to stay ef I couldn't git his meals for him."

"Right to stay! Lucy Ann Tollet, ef it wa'n't fur the grace of the Lord, I believe you'd be a simpleton. I don't understand no sech goodness ; I allers thought it would run into foolishness sometime, an' I believe it has with you. Well, don't worry no more about it ; set up an' eat your dinner. Jest smooth out that mat under your feet a little; you've got it all scrolled up."

No bitter herb could have added anything to the bitterness of that first dinner which poor Lucy Tollet ate after she had left her own home. Time and custom lessened, but not much, the bitterness of the subsequent ones. Hannah had sewed for her living all her narrow, single life ; Lucy shared her work now. They had to live frugally; still they had enough. Hannah owned the little house in which she lived.

Lucy Tollet lived with her through the fall and winter. Her leaving her husband started a great whirlpool of excitement in this little village. Hannah's custom doubled: people came ostensibly for work, but really for information. They quizzed her about her sister, but Hannah could be taciturn . She did their work and divulged nothing, except occasionally when she was surprised. Then she would let fall a few little hints, which were not at Lucy's expense. They never saw Mrs. Tollet ; she always ran when she heard anyone coming. She never went out to church nor on the street. She grew to have a morbid dread of meeting her husband or seeing him. She would never sit at the window, lest he might go past. Hannah could not understand this ; neither could Lucy herself.

Hannah thought she was suffering less, and was becoming weaned from her affection, because she did so. But in reality she was suffering more, and her faithful love for her imperious old husband was strengthening.

All the autumn and winter she stayed and worked quietly ; in the spring she grew restless, though not perceptibly. She had never bewailed herself much after the first ; she

dreaded her sister's attacks on Alfred. Silence as to her own grief was her best way of defending him. Toward spring she often let her work fall in her lap, and thought. Then she would glance timidly at Hannah, as if she could know what her thoughts were; but Hannah was no mind reader. Hannah, when she set out for meeting one evening in May, had no conception whatever of the plan which was all matured in her sister's mind. Lucy watched her out of sight; then she got herself ready quickly. She smoothed her hair, put on her bonnet and shawl, and started up the road toward her old home. There was no moon, but it was clear and starry. The blooming trees stood beside the road like sweet, white, spring angels; there was a whippoorwill calling somewhere over across the fields. Lucy Tollet saw neither stars nor blooming trees; she did not hear the whippoorwill. That hard, whimsical old man in the little weather-beaten house ahead towered up like a grand giant between the white trees and this one living old woman; his voice in her ears drowned out all the sweet notes of the spring birds. When she came in sight of the house there was a light in the kitchen window. She crept up to it softly and looked in. Alfred was standing there with his hat on. He was looking straight at the window, and he saw her the minute her little pale face came up above the sill.

He opened the door quickly and came out. "Lucy, is that you?"

"Oh, Alferd, let me come home! I'll never deceive you ag'in!"

"You jest go straight back to Hannah's this minute."

She caught hold of his coat. "Oh, Alferd, don't-don't drive me away ag'in! It'll kill me this time; it will! it will!"

"You go right back. "

She sank right down at his feet then, and clung to them.

"Alferd, I won't go; I won't! I won't! You sha'n't drive me away ag'in. Oh, Alferd, don't drive me away from home! I've lived here with you for fifty year a'most. Let me come home an' cook fur you, an' do fur you ag'in. Oh, Alferd, Alferd!"

"See here, Lucy-git up; stop takin' on so. I want to tell you somethin'. You jest go right back to Hannah's, an' don't you worry. You set down an' wait a minute. Thar!"

Lucy looked at him. "What do you mean, Alferd?"

"Never you mind; you jist go right along."

Lucy Tollet sped back along the road to Hannah's, hardly knowing what she was about. It is doubtful if she realized anything but a blind obedience to her husband's will, and

a hope of something roused by a new tone in his voice. She sat down on the doorstep and waited, she did not know for what. In a few minutes she heard the creak of heavy boots , and her husband came in sight. He walked straight up to her.

"I've come to ask you to come home, Lucy. I'm a-feelin' kinder poorly this spring, an'-I want you ter stew me up a little gentian. That you give me afore did me a sight of good. "

"Oh, Alferd !"

"That's what I'd got laid out to do when I see you at the winder, Lucy, an' I was agoin' to do it. "

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### **THE *SHUI-MANG* PLANT.**

The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio Vol.*  
*I (of 2)*, by Songling Pu

The *shui-mang* [126] is a poisonous herb. It is a creeper, like the bean, and has a similar red flower. Those who eat of it die, and become *\_shui-mang\_* devils, tradition asserting that such devils are unable to be born again unless they can find some one else who has also eaten of this poison to take their place.[127] These *\_shui-mang\_* devils abound in the province of Hunan, where, by the way, the phrase "same-year man" is applied to those born in the same year, who exchange visits and call each other brother, their children addressing the father's "brother" as uncle. This has now become a regular custom there.[128]

A young man named Chu was on his way to visit a same-year friend of his, when he was overtaken by a violent thirst. Suddenly he came upon an old woman sitting by the roadside under a shed and distributing tea gratis,[129] and immediately walked up to her to get a drink. She invited him into the shed, and presented him with a bowl of tea in a very cordial spirit; but the smell of it did not seem like the smell of ordinary tea, and he would not drink it, rising up to go away. The old woman stopped him, and called out, "San-niang! bring some good tea." Immediately a young girl came from behind the shed, carrying in her hands a pot of tea. She was about fourteen or fifteen years old, and of very fascinating appearance, with glittering rings and bracelets on her fingers and arms. As Chu received the cup from her his reason fled; and drinking down the tea she gave him, the flavour of which was unlike any other kind, he proceeded to ask for more. Then, watching for a moment when the old woman's back was turned, he seized her wrist and drew a ring from her finger. The girl blushed and

smiled; and Chu, more and more inflamed, asked her where she lived. "Come again this evening," replied she, "and you'll find me here." Chu begged for a handful of her tea, which he stowed away with the ring, and took his leave. Arriving at his destination, he felt a pain in his heart, which he at once attributed to the tea, telling his friend what had occurred. "Alas! you are undone," cried the other; "they were \_shui-mang\_ devils. My father died in the same way, and we were unable to save him. There is no help for you." Chu was terribly frightened, and produced the handful of tea, which his friend at once pronounced to be leaves of the \_shui-mang\_ plant. He then shewed him the ring, and told him what the girl had said; whereupon his friend, after some reflection, said, "She must be San-niang, of the K'ou family." "How could you know her name?" asked Chu, hearing his friend use the same words as the old woman. "Oh," replied he, "there was a nice-looking girl of that name who died some years ago from eating of the same herb. She is doubtless the girl you saw." Here some one observed that if the person so entrapped by a devil only knew its name, and could procure an old pair of its shoes, he might save himself by boiling them in water and drinking the liquor as medicine. Chu's friend thereupon rushed off at once to the K'ou family, and implored them to give him an old pair of their daughter's shoes; but they, not wishing to prevent their daughter from finding a substitute in Chu, flatly refused his request. So he went back in anger and told Chu, who ground his teeth with rage, saying, "If I die, she shall not obtain her transmigration thereby." His friend then sent him home; and just as he reached the door he fell down dead. Chu's mother wept bitterly over his corpse, which was in due course interred; and he left behind one little boy barely a year old. His wife did not remain a widow, but in six months married again and went away, putting Chu's son under the care of his grandmother, who was quite unequal to any toil, and did nothing but weep morning and night. One day she was carrying her grandson about in her arms, crying bitterly all the time, when suddenly in walked Chu. His mother, much alarmed, brushed away her tears, and asked him what it meant. "Mother," replied he, "down in the realms below I heard you weeping. I am therefore come to tend you. Although a departed spirit, I have a wife, who has likewise come to share your toil. Therefore do not grieve." His mother inquired who his wife was, to which he replied, "When the K'ou family sat still and left me to my fate I was greatly incensed against them; and after death I sought for San-niang, not knowing where she was. I have recently seen my old same-year friend, and he told me where she was. She had come to life again in the person of the baby-daughter of a high official named Jen; but I went thither and dragged her spirit back. She is now my wife, and we get on extremely well together." A very pretty and well-dressed young lady here entered, and made obeisance to Chu's mother, Chu saying, "This is San-niang, of the K'ou family;" and although not a living being, Mrs. Chu at once took a great fancy to her. Chu sent her off to help in the work of the house, and, in spite of not being accustomed to this sort of thing, she was so obedient to her mother-in-law as to excite the compassion of all.

The two then took up their quarters in Chu's old apartments, and there they continued to remain.

Meanwhile San-niang asked Chu's mother to let the K'ou family know; and this she did, notwithstanding some objections raised by her son. Mr. and Mrs. K'ou were much astonished at the news, and, ordering their carriage, proceeded at once to Chu's house. There they found their daughter, and parents and child fell into each other's arms. San-niang entreated them to dry their tears; but her mother, noticing the poverty of Chu's household, was unable to restrain her feelings. "We are already spirits," cried San-niang; "what matters poverty to us? Besides, I am very well treated here, and am altogether as happy as I can be." They then asked her who the old woman was; to which she replied, "Her name was Ni. She was mortified at being too ugly to entrap people herself, and got me to assist her. She has now been born again at a soy-shop in the city." Then, looking at her husband, she added, "Come, since you are the son-in-law, pay the proper respect to my father and mother, or what shall I think of you?" Chu made his obeisance, and San-niang went into the kitchen to get food ready for them, at which her mother became very melancholy, and went away home, whence she sent a couple of maid-servants, a hundred ounces of silver, and rolls of cloth and silk, besides making occasional presents of food and wine, so that Chu's mother lived in comparative comfort. San-niang also went from time to time to see her parents, but would never stay very long, pleading that she was wanted at home, and such excuses; and if the old people attempted to keep her, she simply went off by herself. Her father built a nice house for Chu with all kinds of luxuries in it; but Chu never once entered his father-in-law's door.

Subsequently a man of the village who had eaten *shui-mang*, and had died in consequence, came back to life, to the great astonishment of everybody. However, Chu explained it, saying, "I brought him back to life. He was the victim of a man named Li Chiu; but I drove off Li's spirit when it came to make the other take his place." Chu's mother then asked her son why he did not get a substitute for himself; to which he replied, "I do not like to do this. I am anxious to put an end to, rather than take advantage of, such a system. Besides, I am very happy waiting on you, and have no wish to be born again." From that time all persons who had poisoned themselves with *shui-mang* were in the habit of feasting Chu and obtaining his assistance in their trouble. But in ten years' time his mother died, and he and his wife gave themselves up to sorrow, and would see no one, bidding their little boy put on mourning, beat his breast, and perform the proper ceremonies. Two years after Chu had buried his mother, his son married the granddaughter of a high official named Jen. This gentleman had had a daughter by a concubine, who had died when only a few months old; and now, hearing the strange story of Chu's wife, came to call on her and arrange the marriage. He then gave his granddaughter to Chu's son, and a free intercourse was maintained between the two families.

However, one day Chu said to his son, "Because I have been of service to my generation, God has appointed me Keeper of the Dragons; and I am now about to proceed to my post." Thereupon four horses appeared in the court-yard, drawing a carriage with yellow hangings, the flanks of the horses being covered with scale-like trappings. Husband and wife came forth in full dress, and took their seats, and, while son and daughter-in-law were weeping their adieus, disappeared from view. That very day the K'ou family saw their daughter arrive, and, bidding them farewell, she told them the same story. The old people would have kept her, but she said, "My husband is already on his way," and, leaving the house, parted from them for ever. Chu's son was named Ngo, and his literary name was Li-ch'ên. He begged San-niang's bones from the K'ou family, and buried them by the side of his father's.

#### FOOTNOTES:

[126] Probably the *\_Illicium religiosum\_* is meant.

[127] See No. XII., note 87.

[128] The common application of the term "same-year-men," is to persons who have graduated at the same time.

[129] This is by no means an uncommon form of charity. During the temporary distress at Canton, in the summer of 1877, large tubs of gruel were to be seen standing at convenient points, ready for any poor person who might wish to stay his hunger. It is thus, and by similar acts of benevolence, such as building bridges, repairing roads, etc., etc., that the wealthy Chinaman strives to maintain an advantageous balance in his record of good and evil.

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#### **WHY SPIDERS ARE ALWAYS FOUND IN THE CORNERS OF CEILINGS**

from The Project Gutenberg eBook of  
*West African Folk-Tales*, by William Henry Barker

Egya Anansi was a very skilful farmer. He, with his wife and son, set to work one year to prepare a farm, much larger than any they had previously worked. They planted in it yams, maize, and beans—and were rewarded by a very rich crop. Their harvest was quite ten times greater than any they had ever had before. Egya Anansi was very well pleased when he saw his wealth of corn and beans.

He was, however, an exceedingly selfish and greedy man, who never liked to share anything—even with his own wife and son. When he saw that the crops were quite ripe, he thought of a plan whereby he alone would

profit by them. He called his wife and son to him and spoke thus: "We have all three worked exceedingly hard to prepare these fields. They have well repaid us. We will now gather in the harvest and pack it away in our barns. When that is done, we shall be in need of a rest. I propose that you and our son should go back to our home in the village and remain there at your ease for two or three weeks. I have to go to the coast on very urgent business. When I return we will all come to the farm and enjoy our well-earned feast."

Anansi's wife and son thought this a very good, sensible plan, and at once agreed to it. They went straight back to their village, leaving the cunning husband to start on his journey. Needless to say he had not the slightest intention of so doing.

Instead, he built himself a very comfortable hut near the farm—supplied it with all manner of cooking utensils, gathered in a large store of the corn and vegetables from the barn, and prepared for a solitary feast. This went on for a fortnight. By that time Anansi's son began to think it was time for him to go and weed the farm, lest the weeds should grow too high. He accordingly went there and worked several hours on it. While passing the barn, he happened to look in. Great was his surprise to see that more than half of their magnificent harvest had gone. He was greatly disturbed, thinking robbers had been at work, and wondered how he could prevent further mischief.

Returning to the village, he told the people there what had happened, and they helped to make a rubber-man. When evening came they carried the sticky figure to the farm, and placed it in the midst of the fields, to frighten away the thieves. Some of the young men remained with Anansi's son to watch in one of the barns.

When all was dark, Egya Anansi (quite unaware of what had happened) came, as usual, out of his hiding-place to fetch more food. On his way to the barn he saw in front of him the figure of a man, and at first felt very frightened. Finding that the man did not move, however, he gained confidence and went up to him. "What do you want here?" said he. There was no answer. He repeated his question with the same result. Anansi then became very angry and dealt the figure a blow on the cheek with his right hand. Of course, his hand stuck fast to the rubber. "How dare you hold my hand?" he exclaimed. "Let me go at once or I shall hit you again." He then hit the figure with his left hand, which also stuck. He tried to disengage himself by pushing against it with his knees and body, until, finally, knees, body, hands, and head were all firmly attached to the rubber-man. There Egya Anansi had to stay till daybreak, when his son came out with the other villagers to catch the robber. They were astonished to find that the evil-doer was Anansi himself. He, on the other hand, was so ashamed to be caught in the act of greediness that he changed into a spider and took refuge in a dark corner of the ceiling lest any one should see him. Since then spiders have always been found in dark, dusty corners, where people are not



likely to notice them.

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## **OVER-REFINEMENT**

from The Project Gutenberg eBook,  
*The German Lieutenant and Other Stories*, by  
August Strindberg, Translated by Claud Field

Sten Ulffot, a youth of twenty years, the last scion of the ancient family of Ulffot, who possessed property in Wäringe, Hofsta and Löfsala, awoke one sunny May morning towards the end of the year 1460 in his bedroom at Hofsta in Upland. After some hours of dreamless sleep his rested brain began to review the events of the previous day, which had been of such decisive importance for him that, still benumbed by the blow, he stood as it were outside the whole affair and regarded it with wonder. The bailiff and sheriff's officer had been there, had shown mortgage-deeds of the house and estate, had read various parchment documents, and the upshot of it all was that Sten, because of his father's and his own debts, was reduced to abject poverty. And since his father in his lifetime had not been a merciful man, the young man must leave the old house, which was no longer his, the very next day.

Sten, who had never taken life seriously, for the simple reason that life had always been an easy matter for him, took this also very easily. Poverty for him was simply an uttered word which as yet lacked any corresponding reality. With a light heart he sprang out of bed, and put on his only but handsome velvet jacket and his only pair of breeches of Brabant cloth. He counted his few gold coins, and hid them carefully in his bosom, for he had now caught some idea of their importance. Then he went into the castle-room, which was quite empty.

The only impression this spacious room made on him was that he could breathe more easily in it. Upon a table fastened to the wall were to be seen damp rings--the traces left by the tankards of beer which the two functionaries had used the day before; it occurred to him that there would have been more rings if he had been with them himself--it looked so stingy!

The sun threw the reflections of the painted windows on the floor, so that they resembled beautiful mosaic work. His coat of arms, the wolf's foot on a red ground, was repeated six times; he amused himself by treading on the black foot, expecting to hear the wolf howl, but every time he did so the reflection of the wolf's foot merely lay on his yellow leather boots. When he took a step forward the reflection of

the foot flew up to his breast and on his white jacket the red shield lay like a bleeding heart torn by the black paw with its outspread claws. He felt his heart beat violently and left the room.

He climbed the narrow stone stairs to the upper story, which his parents had occupied in their lifetime. There every possible movable which makes a house into a home for living beings had been swept off and carried away. The rooms looked like a series of burial chambers, hewn out of one rock, intended for souls without bodies and without corporeal needs. But signs of the life which had been there were still remaining. Two grey spots on the floor showed where a bed had stood; there were two dark lines where the table had been', and between them were marks and scratches left by boots; a dark, irregular stain on the white-washed wall showed where his father had been accustomed to rest his head when he raised it from his work which lay on the table. Some coals from the fire-place had fallen into the room and left dark spots on the floor like those on a panther-skin.

In his mother's room was a stone image of the Virgin and Child fixed to the wall; she regarded her Son with a look full of hope and without any foreboding that she held a future condemned prisoner upon her knees. Young Sten felt a vague depression and went on. Through a secret door he mounted up into the attic and went out upon the roof. Underneath him he saw the whole wide-stretching expanse of land which till lately he had called his own: these green fields which once formed the bottom of the sea, surrounded by small green hills once islands, but lately wore their verdure on his account--to support the poor who clothed him, brushed him, prepared his food, and tended his horses, his hounds, his falcons and his cattle. In the previous autumn he had stood here and watched them sow his corn; now others would come and cut and gather it in. A little while ago it was his to decide when the fishes in the streams should die, when the firs in the wood should be felled, and when the game should be shot. Even the birds in this huge space of air belonged to him, although they had flown hither from the realm of the Emperor of Austria.

He could not yet grasp the fact that he possessed nothing more of all this, for he had never missed anything and therefore did not know what possession was; he only felt a huge emptiness and thought that the landscape had a melancholy look. The swallows which had come that very day flew screaming about him and sought their old nests in the eaves; some found them, and others did not--the rains of autumn and snows of winter had destroyed their little clay dwellings so that they had fallen into the castle-moat.

But there was clay in the fields, water in the brooks and straw on every hillock; as long as they were homeless they could find shelter in every grove and under the thatch of every cottage. They hunted without hindrance in their airy hunting grounds; they paired and wedded in the blue spring weather which was full of the sweet scents of the newly

sprung birches, the honey-perfumed catkins of the osiers, and all the invisible burgeonings of the spring. He went farther up on the roof and stood by the pole that supported the dog-vane. As he looked up to the white clouds of spring sailing by, it seemed to him as though he stood on the aerial ship of a fairy-tale and were sailing among the clouds, and when he looked down on the earth again it appeared like a collection of mole-hills, a mere rubbish-heap cast out of heaven. But he had a foreboding that he must go down and dig in the mole-hills in order to find a living; he felt that his feet stood firm upon the earth, although his glances wandered at will among the silver-gleaming clouds.

As he descended the narrow attic stairs it seemed to him as though an enormous gimlet were screwing him deeper and deeper into the earth. He entered the garden and looked at the apple trees in blossom. Who would pluck the fruits of these trees which he had cultivated and tended for years? He looked at the empty stable; all his horses were gone except a sorry nag, which he had never thought worth riding. He went into the dog-house and saw only ten empty leash-straps. Then his heart grew heavy, for he felt that he had been parted from the only living creatures who loved him. All others--friends, servants, farm-hands, tenants--had, as his poverty increased, gradually changed their demeanour, but these ten had always remained the same. He was astonished that he did not feel the blank so bitterly up there in the ancestral castle with its memories, for he forgot that that sense of loss had long been obliterated by his tears.

He went into the courtyard of the castle. There a sight met his eyes which made him realise his true situation. On a four-wheeled wagon, to which three pairs of oxen were yoked, lay a heap of furniture and household utensils; beneath all lay the great oak bedstead splendidly carved, mighty clothes and linen chests constructed like fortresses against thieves, his father's work-table, the family dining-table, the chairs from the sitting-room with fragments of torn-down, gaudy-coloured curtains, his mother's embroidery-frame, his grandfather's chair with the cushioned arms and the high back, and on the top of all his own cradle and the praying stool at which his mother had so often prayed for her little one. Beside them were bundles of lances, swords, and shields with which his forefathers had once acquired and defended these goods which he must now leave behind in order to go out into the world and earn his bread in the sweat of his brow. All these dead things which, when in their places, had formed parts of his own self lay there like corpses and up-torn trees showing their roots; it was an enormous funeral pile of memories, which he would have liked to set fire to.

Just then the gates grated on their hinges, the drawbridge was lowered, the driver cracked his whip over the first pair of oxen, the ropes and shafts of the cart creaked, and the heavily laden vehicle rattled away on the stone-paved courtyard. As it rolled over the planks of the

wooden, bridge, there was a rumbling like the echo from a grave-vault.

"The last load?" called the driver to the gate-keeper.

"The last," came the answer from the vaulted gateway.

The word "last" made a deep impression on Sten, who felt himself to be the last of his race, but he could not indulge in further reflections, for a man whom he did not know stepped towards him holding the nag.

"The castle is to be shut up," he said.

"Why shut up?" asked Sten, merely to hear his own voice again.

"Because it is to be pulled down. The King does not wish to have so many castles in the land."

Sten laid hold of the reins and mounted the nag; he pressed it with his knees, and holding his head high, rode through the arched gateway. There he took out his purse and threw a piece of gold behind him, which the gate-keeper and the stable-man raced for.

When he had ridden over the drawbridge, he reined in his horse till the cart with its load had disappeared from sight. Then he turned up a narrow path and vanished among the birch trees.

"I wonder what he will do?" said the gate-keeper.

"Enlist," answered the stable-man.

"No, he is no good at that; he has learnt nothing but reading and writing."

"Then he will become one of the King's secretaries."

"Not \_this\_ King's; his father was in disfavour for refusing to bear arms against his fellow-countrymen."

"Then let him become what the devil he likes."

"One cannot become what one likes, one must become what one can; and if one can do nothing, one becomes nothing."

"Just so it is! Just so! But I don't know what one has to learn in order to become a gate-keeper."

"Well, one must be strong enough for it, and keep awake at night; and that the young gentleman cannot do."

"Yes, he can keep awake at night, for we have seen him do it; but

perhaps he is not strong enough to draw the heavy chain."

"Well, stable-man, he must look after himself. Meanwhile I will draw up the bridge, and then we can go the backway to the tavern, and change our piece of gold, and he can do what he likes!"

"What he can, gate-keeper; one cannot do what one likes."

"Quite true! Quite true!"

The chain rattled, the bridge was drawn up, and the gate fell to with a dull crash.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sten meantime had ridden for several hours without exactly knowing whither. He only knew that the way led him out into the world, far from the protection of home. He saw by the sun's position that it was nearly afternoon, and by the nag's drooping head that it was tired; he therefore dismounted, tied the reins loosely round one of the horse's forelegs and led him up from the path to a fine upland meadow where he left him loose to graze. Then he lay down under a wild apple tree to rest, but since he felt that the ground was damp, he broke down some young birches and made a bed out of their soft leaves; he also tore off some long strips of bark and placed them under his head, knees and elbows; then he went to sleep. But when he awoke he felt terrible pangs of hunger, for he had eaten nothing during the last twenty-four hours; he felt his tongue cleaving to his palate and a burning and tickling feeling in his throat. The horse had disappeared. He did not know where he was, could not see a human habitation, and had small hope of finding an inn before nightfall. Then he fell on his knees and prayed his patron-saint to help him. As he mentioned the name "St Blasius" it occurred to him how the saint under similar circumstances had sustained himself on roots and berries in the desert. Strengthened by prayer, he looked round to see what there was to eat and drink. His eye first fell on a birch. It was just the time of year when the sap flows. With his knife he split off a piece of bark and fastened the corners together with wood splinters so that it formed a water-tight basket; then he bored a hole in the tree and from the hard wood trickled out the clear sap resembling Rhine wine in colour. While it was trickling, he climbed into the apple tree, where he had seen a large number of apples, which had hung there all the winter and were certainly rotten but could at any rate fill his stomach. When he had eaten some of them he began to shake the tree, so that the apples fell on the ground. He was just on the point of rejoicing at his discovery and looking forward to drink the good birch wine when he heard a harsh voice calling from below;

"Hullo, Sir thief! what are you doing there?"

"I am no thief," answered Sten.

"He who steals is a thief," answered the voice. "Come down at once, or you will spend the night in gaol."

Sten thought it belter to descend and try to explain himself. He found himself before a man of authoritative appearance, who was accompanied by a large dog.

"In the first place," said the man, "you have committed an outrage on a fruit-bearing tree; punishment--three marks and forfeiture of the axe--chapter seventeen of the forest laws."

"I thought one had a right to plunder wild trees," said Sten in a shamefaced way, for he had never been addressed in this manner.

"There are no wild trees now, though it was certainly so in Adam and Eve's time. Besides, I was purposely keeping the apples to flavour cabbages with. Secondly, you have cut and extracted the sap from my fine carriage-pole."

"Carriage-pole?"

"Yes, I intended to make a carriage-pole of the birch tree. Then you have peeled off birch bark in a wood that did not belong to you; fine --three shillings, according to the same chapter in King Christopher's land-law."

"I thought I was in God's free world and had a right to support my life," answered Sten mildly.

"God's free world? Where is that? I only know tax-free land, land that is assessed, and crown lands. Thirdly, probably--I have no testimony to that effect, but probably it is your horse which is feeding in my meadow?"

"It is my horse, and I suppose it could not die of hunger while the grass was growing round it."

"No one need die of hunger. Any animal can graze by the way-side, everyone can pluck a handful of nuts, and every traveller can cut an axle for his wheel when necessary. You are therefore convicted of fourfold robbery, and I keep the horse."

"And leave me alone in the wood, where perhaps I cannot even kindle a fire for the night."

"Whoever cuts dry wood on other people's land is liable to a fine of three shillings each time. If it were not so, one could never be sure of possessing anything."

"It never was so on my property. There we knew nothing of such laws and paragraphs, and my manorial rights were never so niggardly as yours."

Here a great alteration took place in the bearing of the man of authority. He took the horse by the rein, led it to Sten, held the stirrup for him, bent one of his knees, and said:

"Sir, pardon me, I see you have ridden out for recreation and jest with an old law-student. A few mouldy apples, I hope, will not make any trouble between us."

Sten, who was a lover of sincerity, hesitated a moment before putting his foot into the proffered stirrup, but as he was glad to be safely out of the difficulty, he swung himself up on his saddle.

"Listen," he said in an authoritative tone, "where is the nearest inn?"

"Half a mile southwards, if your lordship is going to Stockholm."

"Good! Now I thank you for the amusement, and put a small question to you. Tell me: if one steals out of necessity, then it is theft; and if one steals to amuse oneself, what is that?"

"A joke."

"Good. But how is the judge to know whether it is a joke or earnest?"

"Oh, he can tell!"

Sten pressed his nag's sides with his legs, bent forward, and said:

"No, friend, he cannot."

The nag shot away like an arrow from the astonished law-student and his carriage-pole.

The prospect of soon obtaining a meal, and the fortunate conclusion of his adventure, had set Sten in a mood which banished gloomy reflections. After a half-hour's trot he rode through the gate of the inn, and was received like a gentleman of high rank. He sat down at a table under a great hawthorn tree outside the house, and ordered a fowl with sage stuffing and a jug of Travener beer. These the host promised to get even if he had to run round the whole village for them.

The May evening was fine, and Sten ate and drank at his ease, though he could not completely banish the alarm which the threatening attack of hunger had just caused him. He could not get the scene with the law-student out of his thoughts, and he felt that soon, when his fine velvet jacket no more protected him, he would come under the hard laws of necessity like any other ordinary man. He perceived that he must certainly become a working member of human society, and join one of its

numerous classes if he wished to continue to live. The earth, with all the products that she bore, was already fully occupied, so that one of the lords of creation might lie on the ground and die of hunger under a fruit-bearing tree if he did not wish to be hung, while the birds of the air might eat their fill with impunity off the same tree. He wondered that men let squirrels and jays plunder hazel bushes, and preserve their freedom, while only in case of absolute need was a man allowed to save his life with a handful of nuts. It seemed to him a cruel contradiction; he might save his life, but not support it, and every meal was as it were a recurrent saving of life. But on the other hand his forefathers had founded these laws and he had himself employed them. Who then was the proper object of his reproach? Was not the fault partly his own, and were not the consequences quite natural?

While he was thus meditating, his eyes were fixed upon a figure which was approaching the garden of the inn from the highway. As it came nearer, Sten saw a man of about thirty with a dark complexion, long arms, and knees and feet curving inwards as though he were afflicted with spavin. Over his shoulder he carried a sack, and in his hand a knotted stick. With a jerk he flung the sack on the table close to Sten, sat down and struck on the table with the stick so sharply that it sounded like a pistol-shot. At the same time he called into the house, "Come out, Mr Innkeeper, and give a worthy member of the worshipful company of blacksmiths in Stockholm a jug of beer."

The innkeeper, who thought that some important person had come, hastened out, but when he saw the fellow he turned round and said to Sten in a disdainful tone: "These fellows never have money. I will give him nothing." "By St Michael, the archangel and St Loyus, innkeeper, if you don't give me beer I will set my mark upon you," broke in the man, and lifted his stick.

"If you threaten, you will be hung for compelling hospitality," said the innkeeper; "you did not pay the last time you were here, so pick up your sack and take yourself off, for the clerk of assize is sitting inside."

"I will pay for his beer, innkeeper," interrupted Sten, who felt a certain sympathy with the unmasked braggart.

"The gentleman is kind and understands a traveller's needs. As regards payment, I think it is all the same who pays. To-day it is my turn, to-morrow yours. In good company I never say 'no.' And a member of the worshipful company of blacksmiths at Stockholm can be as good a gentleman as any other, or any traveller, with your permission."

"You are right, sir; all things considered, we are all travellers, and when we travel we are all alike."

The blacksmith, who had received his jug of beer, lifted it, took his



cap off, and said in a solemn voice, "Saint Michael and Saint Loyus!" Then he threw back his head and took some tremendously deep draughts of the beer, so that the muscles of his neck moved like the backs of snakes. Then he collected his breath, raised the jug once more and said, "Pledge me a toast, sir, with your permission." Then he drank for some minutes so that his neck sinews were strained like harness-straps. When he had finished, he emptied out the last drops, struck the table with his stick, and called into the house, "Two full jugs! Now I am the inviter."

"And the young gentleman pays?" asked the host.

Sten nodded assent, and the blacksmith continued, "It is all the same who pays. '\_Commune bonum\_', as we say in the shop. To-day it is my turn, to-morrow yours."

"Sit down, sir, and let us talk," said Sten. "You are a blacksmith, I hear."

"Banner-bearer to the worshipful company of blacksmiths in Stockholm, thanks to St Michael and St Loyus, with your permission!"

"Tell me, is your trade hard?"

"Hard! Well, it is not for anyone. It is the hardest work there is. It is a trade which the world cannot dispense with. No one can get on without a blacksmith. Believe me when I say it. The Emperor of Rome had a councillor whose name was Vulcant and it was he who invented the blacksmith's art. And you ask if it is difficult!"

"Yes, but one could learn it," said Sten, who felt more amused than convinced.

"Learn it? No, sir, one cannot."

"But you have learnt it," insisted Sten.

"I! With me it is another matter," answered the blacksmith, contemplating the bottom of his mug.

"Well, why cannot it be another matter with me also?" objected Sten.

"Show me your fists, if you please, sir."

Sten laid two small white hands on the table.

The smith grinned. "They are no use. Look at mine." He took the pewter pot in a giant's grasp and squeezed it till it became as slender as an hour-glass.

Sten was still not convinced. "But you were not born with such fists," he said.

"Yes, sir, I was. I was born to be a blacksmith, just as you were born--to do nothing, if you will allow me to say so. What do you expect to do in the world with such mere pegs? You had better not depend on them or you will be disappointed."

"And yet I am thinking of becoming a blacksmith," said Sten innocently.

"You must not make a jest of that worshipful fraternity, sir. Besides, I should like to say that the times are different to what they were formerly; a blacksmith may become mayor or councillor, and Sir Vulcan, whom I mentioned just now, was one of the Emperor of Austria's councillors. One should not be proud, even if one is of high birth. King Karl Knutsson was King one day and the next day he was nothing. If he had learnt something, he would have been something."

"That is just what I wanted to say, dear smith. And I may as well say that I am not a gentleman though I have a velvet jacket."

"Is it a disguise? Aren't you a real gentleman?"

"I have been one, but now I am nothing."

The blacksmith drew up the corners of his mouth, came nearer, surveyed Sten and continued: "Come down in the world? What! Downhill? Eh! Hard times! When thieves fall out, honest folk come by their own. Yes, yes. No relations. No fine friends. Alone in the world. Obligated to work. And now you want to become a blacksmith, when you can't be anything else."

"If I can become one."

"No, you can become nothing. That is less than you are, Claus. (My name is Claus.) Now you can be proud, Claus. But I am not proud, and therefore I invite you again to the jug of beer to which I invited you just now. Was the fowl there good; it looks to me lean." Claus made a movement as though he were chewing something tough.

Sten answered: "The fowl was fat enough; will you have some?"

"If I can be quite sure that it is good; otherwise I don't care about it, for if I spend money I want to have something really good for it."

Sten ordered a fowl and fresh jugs of beer, and recommenced the conversation. "I hope you will recommend me to your guild or company."

"I will see what I can do, but one has to proceed warily with those gentlemen. Congratulate yourself that you have made acquaintance with the banner-bearer of the guild, for he is a powerful gentleman,

although he goes round with a sack when he is on his journeys."

Sten, who was not accustomed to so much beer, at any rate of the sort which was served here, began to feel sleepy and rose up in order to go to his bedroom. But Claus could by no means be induced to agree to this.

"No, stay sitting, my dear," he said, "and drink a glass of wine with me. It is such a fine evening and you have not far to go to bed. If you get sleepy, I will carry you up the stairs."

But Sten could not possibly drink any more. Claus was annoyed and asked if he refused to drink with the guild's banner-bearer. Sten asked to be excused, but Claus would not consent. He said that Sten was proud, and should take care, for pride was always punished. Sten was so sleepy that he could hardly understand what was said, and clambered up the stairs to the attic where in the darkness he sought for a cushion, on which he fell asleep at once.

He had, as he thought, slept for quite twenty-four hours when he felt a burning sensation as though sparks of fire had fallen on his face. He sat up and found that the whole room was full of the hateful humming of a swarm of gnats which had gained admission. When he had somewhat shaken off his sleep, he could distinguish men's voices, and loudest among them the deep voice of his friend Claus.

"Oh, he is a devilish fine fellow. His father and I are very old friends. He has been a little spoilt by wearing fine clothes and so on, but we will soon drive it out of him. Innkeeper, more claret! Yes, you see his father was in my debt, and I waited. Take what you like, parish-clerk!"

Sten sprang up and saw through a chink in the wall how Claus sat at the end of the table and carried on a conversation with the innkeeper and a stranger, who was probably the parish-clerk. The table was covered with jugs and pots, and the party did not seem to have suffered from thirst.

The parish-clerk, who thought that the smith had talked long enough, now led the conversation. "Listen, Claus; you say that he is nothing, that he has no occupation and no money. Do you know what one calls such a gentleman?"

"No, no."

"Well, one calls him a tramp. And do you know what the law says about vagabond tramps?"

"No, no."

"It says that whoever chooses may take such a tramp by the collar and put him in gaol. And that is right, thoroughly right. God, you

see, from the beginning, has created men to work, do service, and make themselves useful----"

"Or to be rich," interrupted the innkeeper.

"Hush! Don't interrupt me--to make themselves useful in one way or another. Suppose," continued he, "that there are men who will not work; suppose that there are people who prefer to live at the expense of other people----"

Claus gave him a sharp look and seized his stick. But after taking a drink, the parish-clerk continued: "Then I ask--what is one to do with such people? Can anyone answer me?"

The innkeeper was about to answer, but the parish-clerk motioned him away with his left hand.

"Can anyone answer this? No, I say, for we know in part and prophesy in part. *\_Cur tuus benevolentium\_*." He finished his mug and got up in order not to spoil the effect of his speech by a bad translation of the Latin.

Sten lay down again and put his head under his pillow. It seemed to him that he had slept another four-and-twenty hours when he was aroused by a foot pushing his bed very emphatically. He sat up and saw by the light of the dawn, which fell through a crevice in the wall, that his friend Claus, who apparently did not venture to stoop, stood on one foot, and laying hold of a beam was feeling in the bed with his foot for his sleeping friend. He accompanied this search with short exclamations--"You! you!" When he caught sight of Sten's face in the dim light he drew his foot back and said: "Do you know what you are, you? Do you know that you are a tramp? Do you know that you will be put into gaol if you do not eat someone else's bread, seeing you have none of your own. I tell you the sheriff is after you, and if you are not off by sunrise you will be imprisoned. Do you understand?"

Sten understood that there was a very good chance of it, as he had already overheard their talk; but he did not understand that one could not go one's own way to seek work, and Claus exerted himself in vain in order to explain to him that one must have work or be the possessor of such and such a sum. Sten, who feared imprisonment most of all, let himself be easily persuaded to take his horse out of the stable and to hand over some of his gold coins to Claus, who promised to settle with the innkeeper. The latter was quite willing, for he himself was liable to no less a punishment for having given lodging to a tramp. Sten shook the good blacksmith's hand, and promised to look him up in Stockholm.

Now he rode again on his horse, shaken out of his sleep, chased out of a casual lodging, flying from the danger of imprisonment, and firmly

resolved to seek no other shelter till he reached the capital.

Two days later, on a Saturday afternoon, Sten reined in his horse on the top of the Brunkebergsasen ridge, on the side where it descends towards the Norrstrom River. Beneath him he saw for the first time the capital, the battle-field whereon struggles for power were waged. On these little rocky islands between the two water-courses, closely encircled by towers and walls, lived the population among whom he wished to enrol himself. The battle between King Karl Knutsson and Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson was at its height, but to Sten it was a matter of indifference who won, for his father had fallen into disfavour with the King, and his family had an old feud with the Archbishop. As the evening sun cast its horizontal rays on the flag which waved from the chief tower of the castle, he saw the arms of the Bondes--the boat against a white background--and knew how the land lay.

Although peace seemed to have been concluded for the time, the difficulty of entering the city gate was not less than before. He would in any case be obliged to give his name and to be registered, and perhaps have to say why he came and where he came from. In his tired mood he fancied he saw a thousand difficulties rise and the walls growing in height till they appeared insurmountable. He felt like a besieger who was thinking of a stratagem by means of which to enter the city. It was there he hoped to find the only place where he could earn his bread by means of the book-learning which he had acquired.

As he was sitting on the hill, lost in these serious meditations, he heard from the foot of it a sound of merry voices mingled with the music of trumpets and flutes. At the angle of the walls before the Klara Convent issued forth a gay stream of folk, disappearing and reappearing from behind the kitchen-gardens on the slope of the Bill. The procession drew nearer. At its head rode a youth, with a garland on his brow and a long spear-shaft wreathed with green in his hand. He was followed by pipers and trumpeters with gooseberry leaves in their caps; after him came a whole crowd of people with black cloth masks and red wooden masks, dressed in the most fantastic garb after Greek and Roman patterns; last of all, riding backwards on a sorry jade, a youth dressed in fur, with loosely streaming hair and beard, to represent winter. It was the procession of the "May-lord," greeting the advent of spring in the Klara district.

Sten seized the opportunity by the forelock, rode down the hill, and joined the procession. He passed through the gateway without being interfered with, although he thought he saw a pair of sharp eyes fastened on him under the archway itself. Meanwhile he could not help thinking how the guard's over-hasty inference "Cheerful people are not dangerous"--had been of use to him, who felt anything but cheerful. He felt easier in mind when he had passed through the gates of both the bridges.

The procession halted in the great market-place, where it broke up in order to reassemble in the restaurant of the town hall. This had received special permission to remain open all night, since the postponed May festival was being celebrated now because of the late spring and the King's victory.

Sten took up his quarters at an inn in the Dominicans' street, which bore an image of St Laurence painted on its signboard. When his horse had been placed in the stable he was shown up to the sleeping chamber. There he found a great number of beds without any chairs, and as the evening seemed too beautiful to remain indoors, he went out into the city in order to take a bath.

When he came out into the street again, he became somewhat depressed at seeing the narrow passages, called "streets," in which pale-faced people walked, breathing unwholesome air and treading in the dirt and kitchen offal thrown out of the doorways. The crowd kept streaming to and fro, and he wondered that they never came to an end nor seemed weary. The street itself, which was paved with rough cobbles, was difficult to walk on, and he did not understand why men should have gathered together these instruments of torture to make the way more stony than it naturally was. Of the sky there was only a grey strip to be seen between the rows of houses, and the high corbel-step gables rose like Jacob's-ladders, on which souls sought in vain to rise to the heights from their dark, evil-smelling dungeons.

He felt confused and astray. At one moment he was jostled by a porter, at another trod on by a horse; then he knocked his head against a window-board. All these people had crowded together on a little island and built on each other like bees in a honeycomb. Why? For mutual aid? He did not believe it.

After inquiring his way to the public baths in the Allmänning's Gata, he felt a keen desire to free himself by a bath from the sensation of uncleanness which even the air he breathed oppressed him with. In the undressing-room which was shared by all, he found a great number of people of all classes, for it was Saturday evening. In the uncertain light he could not see them distinctly, but the pungent odour of perspiration exhaling from their bodies after severe physical labour, made him shudder. He undressed, put on bathing-drawers, and entered the bathroom.

In the midst of it stood an enormous walled fire-place in which a great fire was burning; round it, up to the roof, ran wooden galleries where men sat--some beating each other with rods, others drinking beer. Great stalwart women with tucked-up skirts poured jugs of water on the fire-place, which at once sent out clouds of steam. These the bathers allowed to envelop them, amid loud shrieks and laughter. One caught glimpses of naked bodies, matted beards and shining eyes. And what bodies! They seemed to Sten like a number of wild beasts with hairy

breasts and limbs who did not need clothing, and those who, while they waited for their bath, danced before the fire reminded him of fairy-tales of distant lands where men walked with their heads under their arms and with one eye in their foreheads. He could not make up his mind to address any of them, though they were human beings like himself, but with a difference. They did not talk like him; they did not laugh like him; they were not shaped like him. The bones of their backs looked like the letter X, and their feet were turned inwards so that the toes met; nightwork and heat had rendered their faces emaciated. Was it through willing sacrifice for their fellow-men that they made themselves cripples, or were they compelled by necessity to do so? These smiths with shoulder-blades like knapsacks, with arms as long as the helve of a sledge-hammer, with the soles of their feet flattened and distorted; these tailors with thin chests, crooked legs as slender as sticks, and bent backs--were they conscious that their deformity set off the handsome appearance of others?

For a moment his aesthetic Sense was offended and he wished to go, but he was restrained by the thought that he must also soon perhaps undergo some similar deformity in order to perform his duty in this society into which he was now forced to enter as a retribution for his ancestors' mistake in withdrawing him from the lot which all were born to share. But the peasants, fishermen, and huntsmen he had formerly known, did not look like these! The former were like the trees of the wood, straight though knotted. Here in the working life of the town some mistake had been made, but he could not say what. He shyly approached one of the giantesses and asked if he could have a water bath.

The old woman looked at his white skin and his small hands and pushed him into a smaller room, where some empty bath-tubs stood on the ground.

"He is certainly a fine gentleman's son," she said, regarding him critically. "He has evidently come to the wrong place, but that does not matter." She laid the youth in the bath as though he were a child, and began to rub his skin with a horsehair brush.

"No! that will make holes in his skin, one can see. Yes, men are so different from each other. A foot like a girl's; one can see how the blood runs in the veins. I am sure that these fine folk have not the same blood as we. And such hands! Pure as those of St John which they have made of wax in Our Lady's chapel. They are not made to lay hold of with."

When the bath was ended, the old woman set Sten on a stool and dried him carefully, as though she were afraid of breaking one of his limbs. Then she took a comb and began to do his fair hair, talking to herself the while. "Pure silk and gold! One might weave a mass-robe for the Bishop from this hair!"

Then a gnat flew in through the window-opening and settled on Sten's bare shoulder; it had not long to look in order to find a place into which to sink its sting, for his skin was milk-white and soft after the warm bath.

The old woman stopped in her task, and observed almost with alarm how the uninvited parasite bled the fine gentleman; she saw how the gnat's transparent body filled itself with clear red blood, and how it lifted its front leg as if to seize its prey firmly. Then the giantess seized with the tips of her nails the little blood-letter by its wings and held it against the light.

"What is that?" asked Sten, and made a movement.

The old woman was too deep in her contemplation to answer at once. At last she said, "Ob, it was a gnat!"

"Which has got noble blood in its vein," broke in Sten. "Now do you think, old woman, that it is better than the other gnats?"

"That one cannot exactly know," said the giantess, still examining her captive. "Blood is thicker than water. I have seen many gnats in my time, but this one is something unusual. I should like to let it live."

"And to see how it would give itself airs over the other gnats. You would like to see it propagate young lord and lady gnats who would sit on silk and let themselves be fed by others. No, you shall see that it is just as plebeian as all the others, and that it has the same blood as you and can die as easily as its companion gnats outside."

He struck the old woman's finger with his hand, and there appeared only a bright red spot of blood upon it.

"Now was it not as I said?" she exclaimed. "It is as bright as red gold."

"That is because it is thinner," said Sten, "therefore it will soon be like pure water; and therefore you see the nobles will die and the serfs will live."

The conversation was over and Sten rose up, thanked his attendant, and went into the great bathroom where the noise was deafening owing to the beer and the heat combined. He hastened by the bathers into the undressing-room, where he found his clothes with difficulty under piles of leather trousers, smocks, and vests.

When he came out into the street he directed his steps through the Merchants' Gate to the Great Market. There he saw the town hall lit up; the great door which led to the underground restaurant was decorated with fir branches, weapons and flags. He descended the broad staircase,



attracted by the music of violins, flutes, and trumpets. Although he did not think it reasonable that men should collect to enjoy themselves underground, when the earth itself was so spacious and beautiful, yet he felt bound to confess that the restaurant of the town hall presented an imposing appearance with its huge pillars which this evening were decked with garlands of fir twigs and bunches of liver-wort, anemones and cowslips. Enormous beer and wine barrels, arranged in rows, formed three great alleys running from the tap-room, which was adorned by a huge figure of Bacchus riding on a cask. In tubs filled with sand stood young firs and junipers, and the ground was strewn with cut fir twigs. The musicians sat on a gigantic barrel, and from the vaulted roof hung barrel-hoops with oil-lamps and wax-lights. An enormous number of people, half in disguise, half in their holiday clothes, stood in groups round the tables or walked down the tub-lined alleys. The joy seemed universal and genuine, for it had a natural cause--the arrival of spring, and a less natural one--the return of the King for the third time.

Sten wandered lonely among the festive groups, without the hope of meeting a friend. He felt thirsty after his bath but was ashamed to ask for anything, for he did want to drink alone. But as he walked he grew suddenly conscious that someone was looking at him. He turned round and saw a little yellow, dried-up, narrow-chested man who for want of a table had sat down by an upturned barrel and taken a smaller one for a seat. He had before him a stone jug filled with Rhenish wine and two small green wine-glasses. He was alone and only drank out of one glass.

"Will the young gentleman sit down?" he asked in a weak, sibilant voice, beginning at once to cough. "I see the young gentleman is alone, and so am I."

Sten looked interrogatively at the empty glass, but the coughing man answered his question by bringing an unoccupied barrel which he offered him to sit on.

"I have a terrible cough," said the yellow man, "but don't let that disturb you. The spring-time is always trying for those with weak chests. It is now spring again," he added in the melancholy voice with which one might say "It is now autumn again."

Sten felt obliged to say something. "You should drink sweet wine instead of sour."

"My chest complaint is not of that kind," he answered, and began to cough again by way of demonstrating the fact. "I am a clerk in the cloth factory of the town, and there one gets this kind of cough. The dust of the wool affects the lungs and the workers do not live beyond thirty-six. I am now thirty-five," he added with caustic humour, and emptied his glass.

"Why don't you choose another occupation?" asked Sten in a friendly and child-like way.

"Choose? One doesn't choose, young sir. Society in the city is a building in which each man is a stone fitted into its place; if he moves, he disturbs the whole edifice. But society has committed an oversight by not forbidding men in my position to marry. For if the fathers cannot marry till they are thirty and die at thirty-six, the children must go under." He pointed to the ground and continued: "You see, it is a human instinct to climb up; by 'up' one means freedom from work. That is what we climb and struggle for. There are two methods of getting up--an honourable and a dishonourable. The latter is the easier but may end with a crash. I have always been honest."

The drummer standing on the great barrel beat a roll-call on his drum, which signified that someone was about to make a speech.

A heavily built man now mounted a decorated cask. He wore a tunic edged with fur, with a red cloth lining and a round fur cap--a garb which was more adapted for outward appearance than for warmth. It was the mayor.

"Now the King's health will be proposed," explained the factory clerk. "This is the third time that he proposes it, and three times already he has cursed the King and drunk to the health of the Archbishop and the Danish King. A true citizen, you see, drinks to whichever power is in the ascendant, for that power always protects trade, and a city consists of tradesmen; the others do not count."

Sten caught isolated words of the mayor's speech while the clerk continued to whisper in his ear:

"A middleman sits in a comfortable room. He has a letter written to the seller and asks the price. Then he has a letter written to the buyer and asks what he will give. And so the bargain is concluded through him. If the buyer and seller could meet and do their business directly, no middlemen would be necessary, but that they cannot, for then there would be no so-called privileges. And privileges are bestowed by the ruling power."

Outbursts of applause interrupted both the speech of the mayor and the whisperings of the clerk. When the speech was ended all raised their glasses and cried "Long live the King!"--all except the clerk, who stood up and flung his glass against the barrel on which the speaker stood.

An outcry, like a sudden outbreak of fire, rose from the whole company, and in a few seconds the rebellious clerk was carried backwards by strong arms towards the restaurant stairs. There Sten saw him disappear, coughing violently the while. The shrill sound of his cough pierced through the uproar and the roll of the drums which had struck

up.

The mayor again desired permission to speak, this time through the city trumpeter, and announced that on this joyous occasion of the King's return, the town and the council would give wine freely. A barrel of wine was rolled along, and placed on a seat amid universal approval.

But now there came a new diversion. From one of the many side-rooms which were generally hired for marriages and other private festivities, came a marriage procession with violin-players and torch-bearers at its head, intending to pass through the great hall and accompany the newly wedded pair home. But that was not possible. The excitement was too great to allow such an opportunity to pass unchallenged.

"Dance the bride's crown off!" was the cry, and the next moment all the young men had formed a circle round the bride, separating her from the bridegroom. The bride was a blooming girl of twenty and the bridegroom was a withered-looking man of thirty with the same sickly pallor as the factory clerk, whom he otherwise somewhat resembled.

Sten's curiosity was directed towards the deserted bridegroom, and he did not understand why he felt a certain sympathy with him, though it was his happiest day. Meanwhile the bride had been blindfolded. Sten was drawn into the ring of dancers, which at one moment circled with dizzying rapidity and at another stood still. The bride stretched out her arms and caught Sten round the neck; he fell on one knee, blushing, kissed her hand, and entered the ring with a garland on his head to dance with the bride, who seemed flattered by such unusual attention. Then he stepped up to the bridegroom, paid him some compliments about his bride, and asked permission to drink to his prosperity. Although it was annoying to the latter to be stopped in this way, he could not refuse, and briefly informed Sten that he also was a clerk in the cloth factory. Sten could not resist giving a start of sympathetic surprise, but had no time to observe the bridegroom more closely, for the latter was now drawn into the ring and had to dance with the bride. Sten underwent a strange sensation and thought of the death-dance depicted on the walls of the chapel of his father's castle. "Poor bridegroom!" he thought, "and poor girl!"

But the joy this evening was quite beyond all bounds, and now tables and seats were cleared away, for the bride's-maids were about to dance the torch-dance, which had been specially called for and which was customary at weddings. The girls received the torches from the bride's escort and invited their cavaliers to dance by handing the torches to them.

Sten had drawn back in order to rest after his exertions, and stood with his back against the cold wall regarding the bridegroom in a melancholy way, as the latter with wine-flushed cheeks fluttered uneasily about the bride, who was surrounded by a number of young men.

He felt himself again so lonely among the excited crowd; the various impressions he had undergone during the last twenty-four hours rose up like shadows, and his tired senses began to give way. He closed his eyes and it became dark; the ground seemed to sink under his feet, and he felt a singing in his ears as though he were drowning. He made a supreme effort to hold himself up, and opened his eyes, but saw at first only a dark moving mass in front of him; gradually this was reduced to order and a point of light was kindled against the dark background. It broadened, came nearer, assumed a shape, and then, as when a curtain is quickly drawn back from a picture, a radiant woman's form appeared before him. She was pure light; her eyes were like the Virgin Mary's, her hair resembled silver or gold--it was difficult to say which, her small face was warm and white like newly washed wool. In one hand she held a torch, which she reached to Sten, who took it mechanically, while at the same time he took her free hand which she extended to him. It was all like a vision. As he looked at her small white hand, which lay so confidently in his, the latter seemed to him, in comparison, like that of the giantess in the bathroom.

Sten had to open the dance. Room was made for them, and he and his partner began to thread the swaying crowd. At one moment they parted from one another, then they met again; one instant he put his arm round her and pressed her to his heart, then another cavalier came and took her from him; but whatever happened, they always met again, and he lighted her way with his uplifted torch. Every time they met again he wished to say something complimentary, but he was dumb and could not utter a word when he looked into her eyes. He was lost in wonder at the whiteness of her hand and the smallness of her foot; the latter peeped forth from under her looped-up dress, and with the well-arched instep was so clearly visible throughout the thin silk shoe that her toes might have been counted. A princess accustomed to walk on roses might have envied the middle-class maiden her foot.

When the dance ceased and Sten had laid down his torch, his partner hesitated for a moment, as though she wished to say something or to ask Sten to speak. Sten, however, felt as though his tongue were paralysed; but quick as lightning and without considering what he was doing, he embraced her neck and kissed her on both cheeks as one kisses a sister.

There at once arose an uproar among the wedding-guests, and Sten found himself surrounded by threatening hands and angry looks. But the other guests thought the pair so handsome, and Sten looked so innocent as he stood there blushing at his boldness, that they intervened and made peace. The others insisted on a punishment. Then an elderly man, a town-councillor of a cheerful disposition, stepped forward and declared that the offender should be punished on the spot, but that, because of the freedom allowed on this particular day, the law was willing to wink at his offence. On the other hand the insulted maiden, the daughter of a respectable clerk in the public weighing-house, should, if, he added jestingly, she had really been so much insulted, herself adjudicate

in the matter. His proposal was accepted with unanimous applause; but Sten felt discomposed to see his princess metamorphosed into a clerk's daughter.

The young girl was embarrassed to the verge of tears, and could not utter a word. At last one of her young friends pressed forward and whispered something in her ear. This advice, whispered at the moment of need, seemed to revive the spirits of the despairing umpire, and with almost inaudible voice she pronounced her verdict "The young gentleman must sing!"

"A song! A song!" shouted the emotional throng, and Sten was condemned to do so. He was lifted by strong arms on to the table and was handed a tortoise-shell lute, which one of the Italian painters, who at that time resided in the city, had brought with him. No one inquired whether the victim could sing, for all assumed that a young man of good family could do so.

Sten first played a prelude on the strings while he recovered himself from his embarrassment and the crowd at his feet heaved like a troubled sea. What should he sing? The smells of beer, wine and fir twigs, mingled with fumes from the oil-lamps and wax-lights, filled the air and made him half unconscious. Before his eyes loomed a chaos of red faces, lamps, casks, instruments and flowers. His fingers wandered over the chords but his ear could not find the tune he wanted. There was silence at last, but the many-headed beast which was now looking up to him so expectantly might, the next moment stir, lose patience, and tear him in pieces. Then he saw the blue eyes and white cheeks which still bore the red marks of his kisses; the strings of the lute sounded, and he felt chords in his breast which responded. After striking some loud notes, he began, in a weak voice which grew stronger as he went on, a song in the style of the old Minnesingers, and when he had concluded it he was fully acquitted by the audience. Then the good-natured councillor stepped up to him, thanked him, put his arm round his neck, and walked with him into one of the side-rooms. Here he placed him on a seat, and standing before him with folded arms, he assumed a judicial tone and said: "That was the song, young gentleman; now let us have the words! You have some trouble on your mind, you are not on the right road, and you steal into the town without a pass--you see, we watch our people and they are not too many to be counted."

Sten was beside himself with alarm, but the councillor quieted him, asked him to relate his story, and promised to be his friend. When Sten perceived that the facts must come out in any case, he chose the present favourable opportunity to narrate them privately to a friendly person, knowing that perhaps to-morrow, when the effects of wine had ceased to work, his friendliness might have evaporated. Accordingly he frankly told the councillor everything.

When he had ended, the latter said, "Well, you are looking for an

occupation which is suited to your strength and capacity. You can write, and, as it happens, the city just needs a clerk, for a place will be vacant this evening."

"In the cloth factory?" asked Sten, with a gloomy foreboding that the answer would be in the affirmative.

"Yes."

"The unfortunate man has then been dismissed for his imprudence?"

"Naturally! The city is the key of the kingdom; those who guard the key-cupboard must not be surrounded by traitors."

"I cannot accept the post," declared Sten, remembering the kindness which the unfortunate man had shown him. "'One man dead gives another man bread!'"

"You are ashamed of walking over corpses? But what is our pilgrimage here but a fight for life or death, or a lyke-wake where one sits and waits till the body is carried out. How did I become a councillor? By waiting for the deaths of six others. How shall I become mayor? By waiting for the present mayor's death. And that may be a long time," he added with a sigh. "As regards the dismissed man, I am very sorry for him, but am glad at the same time that you will be saved from going under."

"But he has wife and children."

"Very sad for them! But when a man has renounced his place, as he has done, it is vacant; if you refuse to take it, you will be doing neither him nor yourself a service. Between ourselves, we all thought somewhat as he did, but, look you! one must not say so. I am an old man, sir, and have seen life. It is a perverse and mad business, and Satan himself cannot help one. At present your velvet jacket is white, but to-morrow it will be dirty; the day after, it will be torn, and then, do you know what you are? No longer a young gentleman, but an adventurer and a tramp. Hear my advice, young man. Get bread for your mouth so long as your velvet jacket lasts, and hold your tongue. Sleep over the matter and come on Monday morning to the town hall. I wish you good night and common sense."

Sten rose and returned to the great hall. But it seemed to him empty and desolate now that the bridal procession had vanished. Tired and exhausted by the various emotions he had undergone during the evening and the past twenty-four hours, he resolved to go home.

When he came to the inn and entered his room, he took off his velvet jacket and inspected it. Stained with wine, dirty with the dust of the high road, browned with sweat under the arm-pits, it looked

wretched enough. He lay down and went to sleep wondering where the weighing-house might be; he dreamt of death-dances and factory clerks, fought with corpses, and awoke. Then he went to sleep again thinking of the weighing-house and of a tender farewell to the velvet jacket, with a firm resolve to earn bread, first for one month, and then for two.

\* \* \* \* \*

The beautiful month of May did not keep its promises; snow fell while the apple trees were in blossom, and the sun did not appear for fourteen days. For fourteen dreadful days had Sten, the last scion of the family of Ulffot at Wäringe, Hofsta and Löfsala, stood at his post in the draughty, unwarmed factory by the harbour. From morning till late in the evening he had stood there, with a pen in his half-frozen fingers, registering the names of the kinds of cloth which had been brought by the incoming vessels. He did not really understand why they should be registered any more than if they had been so many stones of the street, flakes of snow, or drops of water; but he obeyed the old councillor's advice, and held his tongue whenever he felt tempted to ask.

The room where he worked was continually being entered by porters and merchants who left snow and dirt on the floor, and let the cold air blow in freely. One bale of cloth after another was thrown upon an enormous table and filled the air with a choking dust. He had not yet begun to cough, but he felt that he breathed with more difficulty; and to add to his troubles, the intense cold had burnt holes in his white hands and made them quite red.

One day he went to a barber's and looked at himself in a mirror. He thought it was another person he was looking at when he saw a lean yellow face full of spots and fringed with an untidy beard. His feet had become so swollen that he could not wear his ordinary boots, but had to use Lapland shoes. He had changed his white jacket for a brown frock-coat and his cap for a slouched hat. His scanty pay obliged him to take his meals in third-rate restaurants where he only got salted food, and the unaccustomed diet had brought on an attack of scurvy. When he once ventured to complain to one of his senior fellow-workers, the latter took him to task and said there were many who worked more than Sten and got no food at all; he himself had had no fresh food since Christmas. This man was the bridegroom whom Sten had met in the restaurant of the town hall; he was envious of Sten because the latter, while still so young, had obtained a post for which he had been waiting for ten years.

"Many get everything given them in this life, and yet are not satisfied," he often remarked when consoling Sten. The latter envied him because of his comparatively good health, his uninjured hands and feet, and the indifference with which he took things. He on his part declared that Sten suffered because he had been spoilt and had not

learned to work, and from this opinion he would not budge.

Sten felt that his bodily health was giving way under the struggle; his friend said that it was a fall in an honourable battle of which no knight need be ashamed. Sten thought that his soul was being injured by the murderous work of perpetually writing figures; however, his friend asserted it was not the fault of the work but because he had been badly educated.

Badly educated! He who had had two nurses and a governess, he who had had tutors in Greek and Latin, could play the lute, and make fine verses! That he would not acknowledge. But he knew that he was unhappy. He also knew now where the weighing-house was. But what was the use of that? He had seen the young girl at a Mass in the city church, but she had been shocked at his appearance; and his friend in the cloth factory told him that she thought Sten looked degenerated. His friend also told him that her father had some money, gave his daughter an education, and hoped to get her well married, so that it was not worth while for Sten to wear out his boots by going there, he added.

One day Sten, weary of copying figures, felt he had had enough of the dark room. Better, he thought, any physical exertion than this eternal writing in which there was no progress and no end. He resigned his post. It was in the middle of a hot summer. He wandered up and down the streets without object and without hope. Lost in thoughts, he contemplated the houses and their signboards as though he expected to find there the answer to the riddle of his life. His gaze was arrested by a large horseshoe which hung on a pole; memories of a nag and a highway began to stir in his brain. Then he heard the blows of a hammer in the courtyard. He entered in and saw a giant who was forging horseshoes. The work proceeded slowly and the giant panted and sweated at each blow.

It brightened Sten up to see the sparks dancing round the anvil, and the forge also diffused a cheerful glow. But the smith did not seem in a cheerful mood, for he broke off his work, sat down on a log of wood, and watched with gloomy looks the iron growing cold. Then as though stung by an evil conscience he went into the smithy and came out again with a piece of red-hot iron, but seemed to be still more depressed, for he laid the iron on the anvil, and then sat down and watched it as though he expected it to turn into horseshoes. Presently he turned round, and Sten, seeing his face, recognised Claus. He went up to him and greeted him as an old acquaintance. Claus at first regarded him with astonishment, and after he had been obliged to recognise him, maintained an air of severe coldness. Suddenly his face brightened, as though a thought had struck him.

"Listen!" he said. "Are you free at present?"



Sten replied that he certainly was.

"By Saint Anschar, you shall become a smith! Now I see that you were really born to be one. Strange what mistakes one may make sometimes! You have developed a pair of fists since we last met, and one soon learns how to grasp a hammer!"

"It is certainly too hard for me, since I did not begin it when I was young," objected Sten.

"Hard? What the dickens! It is not harder than anything else--I mean for one who has the capacity. Listen! We will be good friends and have a fine time. The master sits the whole day in the beer-shop, and only you and I will be here."

Sten thought the proposal as good as any he was likely to meet with, and believed he would find a support in Claus. Accordingly he consented.

"Then we will go at once to the master of the guild of smiths at the journeymen's inn," said Claus.

Sten reminded him that he had said he occupied this office of master, but Claus replied he had given it up owing to having too much to do. They went therefore to the master, whose reception of Claus was so obviously disdainful that Sten on the spot lost a considerable amount of the respect he had felt for him. Meanwhile he was enrolled as an apprentice of the guild, and this new dignity of his was sealed by their drinking a number of mugs of beer in a public-house, and in the evening was ratified by Claus's master, who was the worse for drink. Sten slept that night at the smithy.

The next morning, while the matin-bell was ringing in the Ave Maria Convent, Sten was aroused by being violently shaken by Claus, who said: "Light the fire in the forge and tell me when it burns. I am going to doze a little longer."

Sten blew the fire and worked the bellows for half an hour. When at last it burnt up brightly, he woke Claus.

"Now put the iron in, and tell me when it gets red, I want still to have a wink or two," said Claus, turning to the wall.

When the iron was glowing as red as blood, Sten woke him again.

"Now hammer out the iron till it is as slender as a finger, while I shake off my sleepiness," said Claus, yawning.

Sten went back to the smithy, but now the iron had become black. He worked the bellows and made it red again. Then he took it up with the tongs and carried it out to the anvil, but before he had seized the

sledge-hammer, it was once more black. This process was repeated till Sten became tired. Then he returned to Claus, who was snoring loud, and had drawn his leather apron over his head in order not to be disturbed by the daylight.

Claus became impatient. "Well, you stupid, can't you take the hammer in one hand and the tongs in the other?"

Sten replied he could not.

"Then you can go for a jug of beer."

Sten felt ashamed of going into the street with a tin can, but as Claus began to search in a tool-chest for a hammer, he hurried out.

The morning was fine; the sun shone on the gable-roofs of the houses, and women and girls were proceeding to market. When Sten came out of the public-house with the beer, and was about to cross the street, he suddenly stopped, as though riveted, before someone who gazed at him in astonishment and sorrow. He wished to turn round, but the crowd prevented him; he wanted to raise his cap, but the beer-jug required both his black hands to hold it.

The girl went on her way, and Sten hastened, weeping, back to the smithy.

"What are you whimpering for?" said Claus, who had shaken off his sleep and come out into the sunshine, where he drank his morning draught.

Sten did not answer. Claus took out a plank which he laid on the wooden log against the wall of the house so that he had a support for his back.

"Now we will work," he said, crossing his arms and making himself as comfortable as possible. "You will begin with the cold iron first, so that you learn how to handle the hammer."

Sten lifted the hammer, which was very heavy for him. He struck on the anvil while Claus counted "One and two! and one and two! and one and two!"

"Yes, yes; now you see what a workman has to do. One and two! and one and two! and---- That is something different from lying on eider-down and eating roast-veal! And two and---- You think one gets accustomed to have the sun on one's neck, the forge in one's face, and the smoke in one's nose? No, look you, one never does. And what do you think a pretty girl says when a smith comes with his black hands and wants to put his arm round her waist? 'Let me alone, lout!' she says. A smith can certainly marry when he has saved some money, but he must take an ugly girl whom no one else will have. And two! and one!---- Are

you listening? Do you remember when you sat in the inn and ate fowl with sage stuffing, and, I had a salted herring in my bag? And he had a horse, the young devil, and a velvet jacket. Where is the horse now? Perhaps he is standing in the stable in the Knacker's House, or whatever your father's castle was called. Do you remember that I made you believe that Sir Vulcan was councillor to the Emperor of Rome. Ha! ha! No, a smith is a smith, that is all."

Sten was growing tired.

"Are you lazy, you devil?" said Claus.

"Stop calling me devil," said Sten, "I am not accustomed to it."

"Perhaps his Grace is used to being called 'angel'?" said Claus scornfully.

Sten had been once used to it, but he refrained from saying so. He went on with his hammer strokes.

"One and two! and one and two! and one---- No," said Claus, "you can do that now. Beat out the iron rod now; it is harder to do when it is cold, but still it can be done. I must go now to some business in the town, and when the old man comes, tell him that I met my brother-in-law from the country. But if you have not beaten out the iron rod by the time I come back, I will weld your hind legs together, so that you will be like a herring."

Sten felt quite exhausted and declared that he could not finish the work alone. He also said openly that he had not come here to do Claus's work while the latter sat in the ale-house.

Claus became furious. "Yes, you have, my young man," he shouted. "That is just what you have come for. Look you! I have worked for thirty-five years, and you have done nothing; now I am the nobleman and let you work for me! Is it not so with the aristocracy?" Claus leant himself against the plank with his arms folded and continued: "Yes, I am a devilish fine nobleman, you can believe me! And you will see how I shall flourish. I shall not be rich, but I shall be fat. You look disapproving. You don't agree with my plan, nor understand it. The upper class have invented it themselves, and a very excellent one it is."

Sten replied that in his opinion Claus was a bumpkin.

"Go and fetch the big hammer. You will do some extra work by way of punishment," Claus replied haughtily.

Sten's blood boiled over and he raised the iron rod against Claus. At the same moment he felt something give way in his body, and fell

senseless to the ground.

\* \* \* \*

When Sten awoke to consciousness he was lying in a bed at the hospital, and was condemned to inaction for several months, for he had broken a blood-vessel, and his recovery was doubtful. In the large ward one bed stood close to another, and as soon as it was empty there was always someone waiting to occupy it. Here he saw every day instances how those who did physical labour were exposed to accidents which other classes escaped. At one time it was a carpenter who had cut his foot; at another a mason who had fallen from a scaffolding. One day came a breweress who had scalded herself when boiling wort; on another a pewterer who had burnt his knee at the smelting oven.

Hitherto he had had no idea how widely spread human sufferings were, and when he contrasted his past with his present, he began to guess how the legend of the rich man, who could not enter heaven, had arisen. Thus he lay the whole summer, without fresh air or seeing anything green. He felt bitterly how the best time of the year was passing, and imagined how it looked in the country, and what people were doing every day. Numbers of monks came to the ward, and almost every day the crucifix was lifted by some bed-side to comfort a sufferer.

Sten often talked with the monks and he could not help sharing their view that the earth was a vale of tears. When his pains became severe he felt relief in contemplating the Crucified Who writhed on the cross, and he understood now why the Christian creed had been able to gain so many disciples. One day, when he was especially suffering, he had a visit from Claus, who had heard a report that Sten was dying. He felt now compelled to see and speak with the sick man, and, if possible, to comfort him; but in order to strengthen himself he went first into an ale-shop, with the result that he reached the hospital in a somewhat hilarious condition.

When he again met Sten, whose face had recovered its fair complexion and his hands their delicacy, his former respect for him awoke, and he confessed to himself that there were a finer and a coarser kind of men. He called Sten "sir," and advised him to think about his soul and to repent of his sins; he should not, he said, be sorry that he had to die, for the smiths' company would carry him to the grave, and afterwards hold such a funeral feast as had never been seen in the city. Then he threw out some delicate hints that it was a pity for the hospital to get Sten's clothes when he was dead, and at the same time expressed his admiration of the excellent wool of which Sten's coat was made; for the rest, he believed that old trousers could be altered, and told Sten above all things to take care that nothing was left in the pockets. Life, he said, was very troublesome, and parents who did not teach their children to work with their hands were worse than murderers, and to give children an education was to spoil them. Sten

would have made a good smith, if he had learnt to wield the hammer from his childhood, and he might by this time have married the maiden from the weighing-house. As it was, she had engaged herself to one of the yeomen of the guard. Sten, however, should not be sad about that, for he had not much longer to live, but Claus would carry the flag at his funeral procession as a token that he had forgiven the young gentleman all the wrong he had done him. As he uttered these last words, Claus was so overcome by his noble sentiments that he wept as only a drunken man can.

But Claus never carried the flag, because he was not the guild's flag-bearer, and because Sten recovered. One fine autumn day he was dismissed from the hospital and told that he was no longer ill, but that he would never be strong enough to work. Now he realised the whole terrible truth of what Claus had said: his education had robbed him of the means of earning a livelihood. It was in vain that he went about and sought a place in an already organised society; there was no place for drones in this hive. The only thing remaining was to flee from this hive and seek another where the working-bees supported the drones. He thought of the convents where men did not work but lived very comfortably and could devote their leisure to such refined enjoyments as arts and sciences, and he wondered that he had not before this enlisted in the armies of the Church.

With a light step he walked down to the convent of the Dominican monks in the Osterlang-gata, and rang the bell. The little window in the gate was opened and a monk asked Sten his name and address. He gave his name and asked to speak to the prior with a view to entering the convent. The gate was opened and Sten was admitted into the garden, where he was told to wait.

Meanwhile the prior sat in the hall of the chapter going through the estate and rent books with the steward. Various deficits in these showed a serious diminution in the income of the convent. They were just consulting how this might be increased to its highest possible point again, as the General Chapter of the Dominican Order was constantly demanding support for the war against the heretics, when the gate-keeper's assistant announced Sten Ulffot's arrival, name, and business.

"Ulffot of Wäringe, Hofsta and Löfsala," the prior said to himself, and made the sign of the cross. "He comes as opportunely as though he were sent by St Dominic himself. I know Löfsala thoroughly; it is a splendid estate--twelve hundred acres of open ground, besides saleable meadows and woods, water-mills, saw-mills and a splendid eel-fishery. Let him in! Let him in by all means! Bid the gentleman welcome in the name of the Lord."

"Your Reverence," interposed the steward, "wait a minute. Löfsala is a fine estate certainly, but sad to say the present owner has no taste

for the spiritual life."

"The present owner?"

"Yes, the Ulffot family," continued the steward, "has been obliged to give up everything, and the last member of it is said to be an adventurer who has tried a little of everything but carried nothing out, and is quite come down in the world."

"What do you say? What do you say? H'm! Well, what shall we do with him?"

"From him we shall get neither profit nor honour," said the steward. "We have monks enough who eat our provisions, and this is not a poorhouse."

"Quite right!" said the prior. "Quite right! But who is to tell him that? One of St Dominic's wisest and best rules is, never to send anyone unsatisfied away. Will Brother Francis go into the garden and speak a little with the young man? Speak a little with him, explain it to him, you understand! Let us go on with our work, steward."

Brother Francis was a tall man, of alarming appearance, with a bearish temper, who was employed to scare away such applicants as were not "edible," in the phraseology of the industrious brotherhood; for the Dominican Order was a powerful political corporation, which lived in perpetual strife with princes, for power and property, and was by no means an institution for exercising benevolence.

When Brother Francis saw Sten's insignificant appearance he thought he could make short work with him. "What do you want in the convent?" he asked without any preliminary remarks.

"I seek for the peace which the world cannot give," answered Sten.

"Then you have come to the wrong place," said Francis. "This is the armoury of the Church Militant, and there is never peace here."

"Peace follows fighting," Sten ventured to object; but this irritated the monk, who wished to get done with a thankless task.

"Say what you want and speak the truth--something like this: 'I cannot dig and to beg I am ashamed; therefore I will come here and eat.' If you say that, you will not be lying."

Sten felt that the monk had to a certain extent hit the mark, and answered simply, "Alas, you are right!"

Surprised at this unexpected admission, and touched by Sten's childlikeness, the monk took him farther into the garden and continued

his talk. "I know your history and understand the riddle of your life. When Nature is left to herself, she produces masterpieces; but when man interferes with her work, he makes a bungle of it. Look at this pear tree; it is a descendant from a pear tree at Santa Lucia in Spain, where it was cultivated for five hundred years. You think it is an excellent thing that it can bring forth fine fruits to please our palates? Nature does not think so, for she has produced the fruit for the sake of the pipe which continue the species. Look at this pear when I cut it in two! Do you see any pips? No! Over-cultivation has done away with them. Look at this apple which glows so magnificently with red and gold! It is an English pearmain. It has pips, but if I sow them they produce crab-apples. When, however, a severe winter comes, the pearmain trees are killed by frost, but the crab-apple trees are not. Therefore one ought to give up over-cultivating people, especially when it is done at the expense of others. Such cultivation is unsuited to our country and our severe climate. Have I expressed myself clearly? I am sorry for you, young man, but I cannot help you. \_Beati possidentes\_--blessed are those who have succeeded. Your ancestors won success, but they had not the skill to maintain it!"

He went on to talk of indifferent matters while he conducted Sten to the gate. "There will be an early winter this year, if we may judge by the ash-berries." Then he opened the gate, bowed politely and said "Good-bye, sir."

When the gate closed, Sten felt that he was shut out from society once for all, and he rallied the small remainder of bodily and mental strength which he possessed, to form a resolution. But his will and thinking power had collapsed. The twilight had fallen. He followed the descent of the steep street which led to the sea, as though he were obeying the law of gravitation. His feet led him into a narrow alley which was quite dark and filled with an overpowering stench from the offal which had been thrown away there; but he went on and on, guided by a faint light which appeared at the bottom of the alley. Presently he stood before a water-gate which had been left ajar and through which a moonbeam pierced the darkness. He opened the gate and before him lay the surface of the water lit by the moon which was rising over the island of Sikla. The little waves danced and played in the path of the moonlight and the sea breeze blew freshly shore-wards.

Sten stepped over the narrow threshold and let the gate close behind him, without exactly thinking what he was doing. At the same moment all the bells in the city began to ring for vespers, and the drummers on the city walls beat the tattoo as a signal for the citizens to go to bed. Sten took off his cap, fell on his knees, and said a prayer. Then he stood up, turned his back towards the sea, folded his arms over his breast, looked up at the stars and let himself fall backwards, as though he were going to rest. The silvery water mirror opened like a dark grave, which closed again at once, and a great ring, like a halo, appeared on the surface; it widened into many more circles, which

dispersed and died away. Soon the little waves reappeared and danced and played in the moonlight as though they had never been frightened.

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*Native Indian mother and child, Wikimedia Commons*

### **INCURRING MY MOTHER'S DISPLEASURE.**

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*American Indian stories*, by Zitkala-Sa

In the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will.

I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had



completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance.

My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing. By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gaily festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room, and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause, and some were cheered heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow-students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy

students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our State. It was held at the State capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a "squaw." Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.

Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which hurled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.

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### **RIQUET WITH THE TUFT**

by Charles Perrault

from the 1A etext of

*FAVOURITE FRENCH FAIRY TALES*

ONCE a Queen had a little boy who came  
into the world so unpleasing in face and

so deformed in body that the poor little fellow looked hardly human.

Naturally this was a great grief to the mother, who loved her son, and wished everyone else to love him.

A fairy who was present at his birth assured her that, in spite of his appearance, the babe would be a most lovable child, and that he would make up for his want of good looks by his great intelligence and his kind disposition, besides which, as her gift, she had just endowed him with the power of making the lady he should love best one of the wittiest and cleverest people in the world.

The fairy's speech cheered and comforted the Queen, for she knew that, though beauty is a valuable gift, it can be easily destroyed, but that intelligence and sweetness of temper are lifelong attractions.

By the time the child began to speak, the fairy's words were proved true, for he astonished all around him with his witty remarks, and with the sweet way he had of saying just the right thing; also, in all his little actions there was such cleverness and grace of manner that everybody was charmed with him.

I forgot to tell you that he was born with a little tuft of hair on the top of his head, so that he was at once named Riquet with the Tuft, for Riquet was the family surname.

Seven or eight years later, the Queen of a neighbouring kingdom had twin daughters. The first-born was as beautiful as the dawn, and so great was the mother's joy that the attendants feared lest she should suffer from over-excitement. The fairy who had presided at the birth of little Riquet with the Tuft was again present, so she told the Queen that the little Princess, though charmingly pretty, would have very little intelligence, and would be as dull and stupid as she was beautiful.

This speech damped the Queen's spirits very much, but an even greater disappointment awaited her, for, when the second daughter was born,

she was found to be one of the plainest-looking children ever seen, and the poor mother was terribly grieved about it.

“ Do not distress yourself so much, Madam,” said the fairy; “your little daughter will have much to make her happy. Her wit and liveliness will be such that no one will notice her want of good looks.”

“ God grant it may be so ! ” replied the Queen.  
“ But have you no means of giving a little good sense to my poor pretty one ? ”

“ I can do nothing for her in the matter of intelligence,” said the fairy, “but where beauty is concerned I can do much, and, as there is nothing I would not do to please you, I now give her power to endow the person she loves best with beauty as great as her own.”

As these twin Princesses grew up, their attractions increased, and the whole talk at Court was about the beauty of the elder, and the intelligent wit of the younger.

True, their defects also became more apparent, the younger becoming every day visibly plainer, while the elder daily grew more dull and stupid. When spoken to, she either made no answer at all or said something foolishly rude. She was so awkward in her movements that she could not arrange four china ornaments on a shelf without letting one fall, nor could she drink out of a glass without spilling half of its contents over her clothes.

Although beauty adds so much to the charm of youth, in this case it was the plain Princess who, in every company, attracted the most attention. At first people might go to where the beautiful elder Princess sat, that they might see and admire her, but they soon tired of her senseless remarks, and left her to join the circle which gathered round the plain sister, whose agreeable conversation and sparkling wit charmed all listeners. Sometimes people so far forgot their good manners as to leave the poor beauty all alone; stupid though she was, she could not help noticing this, and she would willingly have given all her beauty in exchange for one half of her younger sister's

intelligence.

Her silliness was so irritating that everyone's patience got worn out, and even the Queen, though a most wise and prudent lady, could not help reproaching her repeatedly for her stupid rudeness, so that the poor Princess was often miserably unhappy.

One day she went alone into the wood near the palace, to weep over her lot without being seen, and she noticed, coming toward her, a small and very ugly young man, magnificently dressed. It was the young Prince Riquet with the Tuft, who had fallen in love with her from seeing her portrait, which hung on the walls of every castle he visited. He had come all the way from his father's kingdom, a very long way off, to have the pleasure of seeing her personally, and, if possible, of entering into conversation with her.

Delighted to find the beautiful Princess alone, he went forward with respectful politeness, and, bowing low, begged to be allowed to introduce himself. After he had talked to her for some time, paying her many compliments, but getting no answers to his remarks, he noticed that she seemed oppressed with deep melancholy.

"I cannot understand. Madam," said he, "how anyone so beautiful as yourself can be so sad as you appear to be, for, although I can boast of having seen many beautiful ladies in my travels, I can say, with truth, that I have never seen any one whose beauty approaches yours."

"It pleases you to say so," was all he got for his pretty speech.

"Beauty," continued Riquet with the Tuft, "is such a very precious possession that it ought to make up for all disadvantages, and, in my opinion, those who have it need not let anything else trouble them."

"I should prefer," said the Princess sadly, "being as ugly as yourself and being clever, to being so beautiful yet looked upon as a fool."

"Nothing is such a sure sign of good sense,

Madam, as to recognize one's own defects. No one who is really wise ever thinks himself wise enough."

" I know nothing about that," said the Princess.  
" What I do know is that I am very stupid, and that makes me feel ready to die of grief."

" If that is all that troubles you, Madam, I can easily put an end to your sorrow! " said Riquet with the Tuft.

" What can you do in the matter ? " asked the Princess.

" Madam," replied he, " I can endow the person I love best with as much cleverness as any one could wish to possess, and, as you are that person, it remains with yourself to choose whether or not you will become the most witty lady in the world. One condition, however, must be observed—you must be willing to marry me."

The Princess was dumbfounded—she answered not a word!

" I see," continued Riquet with the Tuft, " that the bare idea is painful to you, and that does not surprise me, so I will give you a whole year to make up your mind."

The poor stupid Princess thought a year was such a long time that it would hardly ever come to an end, and, having a great desire to be as clever as her sister, she promised to marry Riquet with the Tuft a year from that day.

No sooner had she given her promise than such a marvellous change came over her that she felt like a different creature. She could think clearly and express her ideas with astonishing ease, speaking on every subject with keen intelligence, and using the most refined and polished language.

She began a bantering conversation with the Prince, when her ready wit and brilliant sallies made him ask himself whether he had not made her more clever than himself.

On her return to the palace, the amazing change in the Princess was so evident that the

whole Court was surprised and puzzled. No one knew what to make of it, for, whereas they had once never heard her speak without saying something silly or rude, or both, now she spoke with the good sense and quiet dignity of a highly cultivated lady, fit to be the partner of the most particular of kings or princes.

The joy at Court was extreme. From the King and Queen to the humblest attendant, everyone was delighted with the lively wit which now added such a charm to their beautiful Princess. The younger sister alone found it impossible to rejoice.

It was indeed hard on her, for the one advantage which her cleverness had given her over her stupid but beautiful sister was now of no account; everyone crowded round the brilliant beauty, without taking the trouble to notice her poor, plain-looking self, for even in Courts people can be selfishly neglectful of other people's feelings.

The elder sister was now as much sought after for her wisdom as for her beauty. The King took her advice in everything that concerned his government, and he even held his privy council in her room.

The rumour of this great change spread far and wide, and all the princes of the neighbouring kingdoms vied with each other as suitors for the hand of the beautiful Princess, who listened courteously to one after another, but as she found none of them sufficiently interesting to please her, she accepted none. If you think it strange that she had forgotten her promise to Riquet with the Tuft you will hear shortly how this came about.

Finally came a young Prince who was so powerful, so rich, so clever, and so very handsome that she could not help feeling attracted by him.

Her father noticed this, and told her that he left her quite free to choose the husband she preferred; she had only to tell him when her choice was made.

The more good sense people have, the more difficult they find it to decide in such an important affair as marriage. The Princess thanked her father,

and asked to be allowed a little time for reflection before deciding.

As she wished to be alone with her thoughts, she went out for a quiet walk, and entered the wood without remembering that, a year before, in this very wood, she had promised to marry the Prince whose marvellous gift had made her so intelligent. Indeed, the first result of that gift had been that all memory of her former stupid words and actions was quite blotted out.

For a while she walked on, in deep thought, but after a little time she became aware of dull muffled sounds somewhere quite near, so she stood still to listen.

The sounds seemed to come from beneath her feet, as if many people were busily working underground, and she even heard their voices and could distinguish their words.

"Fetch me the pan," said one. "Hand me that kettle," said another. "Put more wood on the fire," said a third.

As the Princess stood bewildered, the ground in front of her opened, and, to her utter amazement, she saw the interior of a great kitchen, with men-servants and maids busily engaged in preparing a grand banquet.

At the same time a band of twenty or thirty men who had charge of the roasting came out, and went to take their places round a long table placed in an alley of the wood. Each had his larding-pin in his hand, and they all began to work heartily together, keeping time to a merry song.

The astonished Princess asked for whom they were preparing such a feast.

"We are preparing the wedding-feast of Prince Riquet with the Tuft, Madam," was the reply. "He is to be married to-morrow."

The words recalled in a flash her promise to the Prince, and she stood stunned and ready to fall, as if she had received a blow. Recovering herself,



she walked on a few paces, and suddenly found herself face to face with the Prince, magnificently arrayed as became a royal bridegroom.

Riquet with the Tuft advanced joyfully to meet her.

“ How delighted I am, dear Princess, to find you as punctual as myself in keeping our appointment ! I had hardly dared to hope that you would come yourself to meet me, and to make me the happiest man in the world by giving me your hand.”

The Princess drew back coldly and replied:

“ I must confess that I had no such intention. I have not yet made up my mind on the subject, nor do I think I shall ever be able to grant your request.”

“ Your words astonish me, Madam,” said the Prince, completely taken aback.

“ I quite believe you,” said the Princess, “ and if I had to deal with a coarse, vulgar fellow, too stupid to take in the situation, I should indeed be in a difficulty, but as I am addressing the most refined and intelligent gentleman in the whole world, I feel quite sure that you yourself will see how impossible it would be for me to keep a promise made when I had not the sense to know what I was doing. If you really wished me to marry you, it would have been wiser not to have made me so difficult to please that I have already rejected the handsomest princes who have asked me in marriage.”

“Madam,” said Riquet with the Tuft, “you have admitted that a coarse and stupid man might have held you to your word! Is it just or kind to treat me worse than such a fellow, because I am a gentleman ? Surely that cannot be approved by one who so greatly desired the gift of wit and wisdom for herself! But, be that as it may, let us come to facts. Permit me to ask. Madam, if, apart from my appearance, there is anything else about me which displeases you ? Do you disapprove of my birth, my character, or my manners ? ”

“Not at all,” said the Princess; “in all these I find you perfect.”

“ If that is so,” said Riquet with the Tuft, “ I may yet be happy, as you yourself can make me the most lovable of men, even in appearance.”

“ How can I possibly do that ? ” asked the Princess.

“ By loving me so much that you wish me to be handsome, Madam; for the same fairy who gave me power to make you wise, gave you, at your birth, the power to make the man you love as handsome as you are beautiful.”

“ If that is so,” said the Princess, “ I desire with all my heart that you may become the finest-looking Prince in the wide world! ”

The Princess had no sooner uttered the words than Prince Riquet with the Tuft stood before her transformed!

In face, in person, and in bearing she felt she had never seen his equal.

Some people tell us that it was not the fairy’s magic which worked the change. They say that, as “ beauty is in the eyes of the beholder,” it was the great love that filled the heart of the Princess when she thought of all the Prince’s goodness of heart and other great qualities that made her see him in quite a different light. However that may be, the Princess was eager to marry Prince Riquet with the Tuft as soon as she could obtain her father’s consent. This the King gave at once, for he had long heard of the Prince’s great intelligence and sweetness of disposition, and now that he saw him and heard him speak he was highly pleased to have him for his son-in-law. So the marriage took place the very next day, all the Court sharing in the festivities which had already been prepared by the Prince’s retainers.

Prince Riquet with the Tuft and his beautiful and witty Princess lived long and happily together, admired and loved by their loyal subjects in every part of their kingdom.

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## THE CURATE'S FRIEND

by E. M. Forster

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It is uncertain how the Faun came to be in Wiltshire. Perhaps he came over with the Roman legionaries to live with his friends in camp, talking to them of Lucretius, or Garganus or of the slopes of Etna; they in the joy of their recall forgot to take him on board, and he wept in exile; but at last he found that our hills also understood his sorrows, and rejoiced when he was happy. Or, perhaps he came to be there because he had been there always. There is nothing particularly classical about a faun: it is only that the Greeks and Italians have ever had the sharpest eyes. You will find him in the "Tempest" and the "Benedicite;" and any country which has beech clumps and sloping grass and very clear streams may reasonably produce him.

How I came to see him is a more difficult question. For to see him there is required a certain quality, for which truthfulness is too cold a name and animal spirits too coarse a one, and he alone knows how this quality came to be in me. No man has the right to call himself a fool, but I may say that I then presented the perfect semblance of one. I was facetious without humour and serious without conviction. Every Sunday I would speak to my rural parishioners about the other world in the tone of one who has been behind the scenes, or I would explain to them the errors of the Pelagians, or I would warn them against hurrying from one dissipation to another. Every Tuesday I gave what I called "straight talks to my lads"--talks which led straight past anything awkward. And every Thursday I addressed the Mothers' Union on the duties of wives or widows, and gave them practical hints on the management of a family of ten.

I took myself in, and for a time I certainly took in Emily. I have never known a girl attend so carefully to my sermons, or laugh so heartily at my jokes. It is no wonder that I became engaged. She has made an excellent wife, freely correcting her husband's absurdities, but allowing no one else to breathe a word against them; able to talk about the sub-conscious self in the drawing-room, and yet have an ear for the children crying in the nursery, or the plates breaking in the scullery. An excellent wife--better than I ever imagined. But she has not married me.

Had we stopped indoors that afternoon nothing thing would have happened. It was all owing to Emily's mother, who insisted on our tea-ing out. Opposite the village, across the stream, was a small chalk down, crowned by a beech copse, and a few Roman earth-works. (I lectured very vividly on those earthworks: they have since proved to be Saxon). Hither did I drag up a tea-basket and a heavy rug for Emily's mother, while Emily and

a little friend went on in front. The little friend--who has played all through a much less important part than he supposes--was a pleasant youth, full of intelligence and poetry, especially of what he called the poetry of earth. He longed to wrest earth's secret from her, and I have seen him press his face passionately into the grass, even when he has believed himself to be alone. Emily was at that time full of vague aspirations, and, though I should have preferred them all to centre in me, yet it seemed unreasonable to deny her such other opportunities for self-culture as the neighbourhood provided.

It was then my habit, on reaching the top of any eminence, to exclaim facetiously "And who will stand on either hand and keep the bridge with me?" at the same moment violently agitating my arms or casting my wide-awake eyes at an imaginary foe. Emily and the friend received my sally as usual, nor could I detect any insincerity in their mirth. Yet I was convinced that some one was present who did not think I had been funny, and any public speaker will understand my growing uneasiness.

I was somewhat cheered by Emily's mother, who puffed up exclaiming, "Kind Harry, to carry the things! What should we do without you, even now! Oh, what a view! Can you see the dear Cathedral? No. Too hazy. Now \_I'm\_ going to sit \_right\_ on the rug." She smiled mysteriously. "The downs in September, you know."

We gave some perfunctory admiration to the landscape, which is indeed only beautiful to those who admire land, and to them perhaps the most beautiful in England. For here is the body of the great chalk spider who straddles over our island--whose legs are the south downs and the north downs and the Chilterns, and the tips of whose toes poke out at Cromer and Dover. He is a clean creature, who grows as few trees as he can, and those few in tidy clumps, and he loves to be tickled by quickly flowing streams. He is pimpled all over with earth-works, for from the beginning of time men have fought for the privilege of standing on him, and the oldest of our temples is built upon his back.

But in those days I liked my country snug and pretty, full of gentlemen's residences and shady bowers and people who touch their hats. The great sombre expanses on which one may walk for miles and hardly shift a landmark or meet a genteel person were still intolerable to me. I turned away as soon as propriety allowed and said "And may I now prepare the cup that cheers?"

Emily's mother replied: "Kind man, to help me. I always do say that tea out is worth the extra effort. I wish we led simpler lives." We agreed with her. I spread out the food. "Won't the kettle stand? Oh, but \_make\_ it stand." I did so. There was a little cry, faint but distinct, as of something in pain.

"How silent it all is up here!" said Emily.

I dropped a lighted match on the grass, and again I heard the little cry.

"What is that?" I asked.

"I only said it was so silent," said Emily.

"Silent, indeed," echoed the little friend.

Silent! the place was full of noises. If the match had fallen in a drawing-room it could not have been worse, and the loudest noise came from beside Emily herself. I had exactly the sensation of going to a great party, of waiting to be announced in the echoing hall, where I could hear the voices of the guests, but could not yet see their faces. It is a nervous moment for a self-conscious man, especially if all the voices should be strange to him, and he has never met his host.

"My dear Harry!" said the elder lady, "never mind about that match. That'll smoulder away and harm no one. Tea-ee-ee! I always say--and you will find Emily the same--that as the magic hour of five approaches, no matter how good a lunch, one begins to feel a sort of----"

Now the Faun is of the kind who capers upon the Neo-Attic reliefs, and if you do not notice his ears or see his tail, you take him for a man and are horrified.

"Bathing!" I cried wildly. "Such a thing for our village lads, but I quite agree--more supervision--I blame myself. Go away, bad boy, go away!"

"What will he think of next!" said Emily, while the creature beside her stood up and beckoned to me. I advanced struggling and gesticulating with tiny steps and horrified cries, exorcising the apparition with my hat. Not otherwise had I advanced the day before, when Emily's nieces showed me their guinea pigs. And by no less hearty laughter was I greeted now. Until the strange fingers closed upon me, I still thought that here was one of my parishioners and did not cease to exclaim, "Let me go, naughty boy, let go!" And Emily's mother, believing herself to have detected the joke, replied, "Well I must confess they are naughty boys and reach one even on the rug: the downs in September, as I said before."

Here I caught sight of the tail, uttered a wild shriek and fled into the beech copse behind.

"Harry would have been a born actor," said Emily's mother as I left them.

I realized that a great crisis in my life was approaching, and that if I failed in it I might permanently lose my self-esteem. Already in the

wood I was troubled by a multitude of voices--the voices of the hill beneath me, of the trees over my head, of the very insects in the bark of the tree. I could even hear the stream licking little pieces out of the meadows, and the meadows dreamily protesting. Above the din--which is no louder than the flight of a bee--rose the Faun's voice saying, "Dear priest, be placid, be placid: why are you frightened?"

"I am not frightened," said I--and indeed I was not. "But I am grieved: you have disgraced me in the presence of ladies."

"No one else has seen me," he said, smiling idly. "The women have tight boots and the man has long hair. Those kinds never see. For years I have only spoken to children, and they lose sight of me as soon as they grow up. But you will not be able to lose sight of me, and until you die you will be my friend. Now I begin to make you happy: lie upon your back or run races, or climb trees, or shall I get you blackberries, or harebells, or wives----"

In a terrible voice I said to him, "Get thee behind me!" He got behind me. "Once for all," I continued, "let me tell you that it is vain to tempt one whose happiness consists in giving happiness to others."

"I cannot understand you," he said ruefully. "What is to tempt?"

"Poor woodland creature!" said I, turning round. "How could you understand? It was idle of me to chide you. It is not in your little nature to comprehend a life of self-denial. Ah! if only I could reach you!"

"You have reached him," said the hill.

"If only I could touch you!"

"You have touched him," said the hill.

"But I will never leave you," burst out the Faun. "I will sweep out your shrine for you, I will accompany you to the meetings of matrons. I will enrich you at the bazaars."

I shook my head. "For these things I care not at all. And indeed I was minded to reject your offer of service altogether. There I was wrong. You shall help me--you shall help me to make others happy."

"Dear priest, what a curious life! People whom I have never seen--people who cannot see me--why should I make them happy?"

"My poor lad--perhaps in time you will learn why. Now begone: commence. On this very hill sits a young lady for whom I have a high regard. Commence with her. Aha! your face falls. I thought as much. You \_cannot\_ do anything. Here is the conclusion of the whole matter!"

"I can make her happy," he replied, "if you order me; and when I have done so, perhaps you will trust me more."

Emily's mother had started home, but Emily and the little friend still sat beside the tea-things--she in her white piqué dress and biscuit straw, he in his rough but well-cut summer suit. The great pagan figure of the Faun towered insolently above them.

The friend was saying, "And have you never felt the appalling loneliness of a crowd?"

"All that," replied Emily, "have I felt, and very much more--"

Then the Faun laid his hands upon them. They, who had only intended a little cultured flirtation, resisted him as long as they could, but were gradually urged into each other's arms, and embraced with passion.

"Miscreant!" I shouted, bursting from the wood. "You have betrayed me."

"I know it: I care not," cried the little friend. "Stand aside. You are in the presence of that which you do not understand. In the great solitude we have found ourselves at last."

"Remove your accursed hands!" I shrieked to the Faun.

He obeyed and the little friend continued more calmly: "It is idle to chide. What should you know, poor clerical creature, of the mystery of love of the eternal man and the eternal woman, of the self-effectuation of a soul?"

"That is true," said Emily angrily. "Harry, you would never have made me happy. I shall treat you as a friend, but how could I give myself to a man who makes such silly jokes? When you played the buffoon at tea, your hour was sealed. I must be treated seriously: I must see infinities broadening around me as I rise. You may not approve of it, but so I am. In the great solitude I have found myself at last."

"Wretched girl!" I cried. "Great solitude! O pair of helpless puppets----"

The little friend began to lead Emily away, but I heard her whisper to him: "Dear, we can't possibly leave the basket for Harry after this: and mother's rug; do you mind having that in the other hand?"

So they departed and I flung myself upon the ground with every appearance of despair.

"Does he cry?" said the Faun.

"He does not cry," answered the hill. "His eyes are as dry as pebbles."

My tormentor made me look at him. "I see happiness at the bottom of your heart," said he.

"I trust I have my secret springs," I answered stiffly. And then I prepared a scathing denunciation, but of all the words I might have said, I only said one and it began with "D."

He gave a joyful cry, "Oh, now you really belong to us. To the end of your life you will swear when you are cross and laugh when you are happy. Now laugh!"

There was a great silence. All nature stood waiting, while a curate tried to conceal his thoughts not only from nature but from himself. I thought of my injured pride, of my baffled unselfishness, of Emily, whom I was losing through no fault of her own, of the little friend, who just then slipped beneath the heavy tea basket, and that decided me, and I laughed.

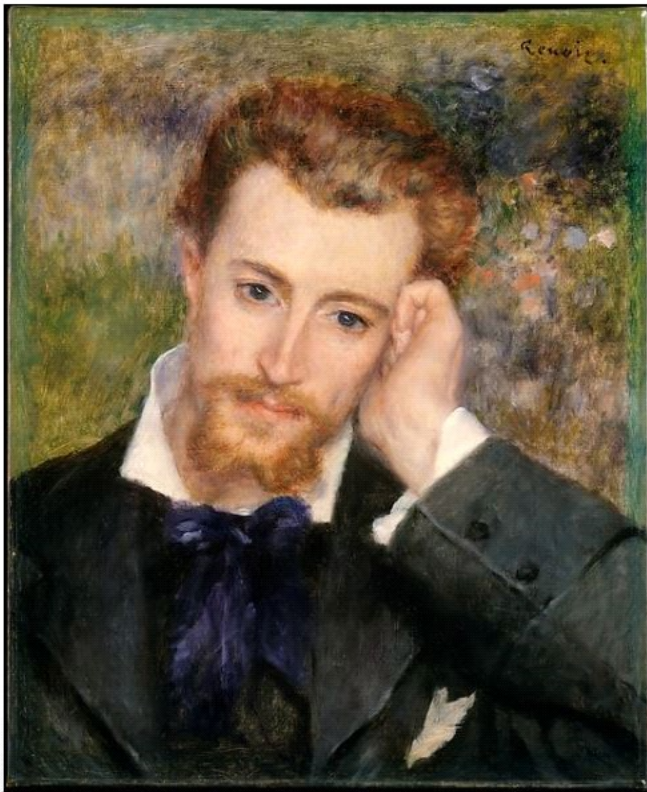
That evening, for the first time, I heard the chalk downs singing to each other across the valleys, as they often do when the air is quiet and they have had a comfortable day. From my study window I could see the sunlit figure of the Faun, sitting before the beech copse as a man sits before his house. And as night came on I knew for certain that not only was he asleep, but that the hills and woods were asleep also. The stream, of course, never slept, any more than it ever freezes. Indeed, the hour of darkness is really the hour of water, which has been somewhat stifled all day by the great pulsings of the land. That is why you can feel it and hear it from a greater distance in the night, and why a bath after sundown is most wonderful.

The joy of that first evening is still clear in my memory, in spite of all the happy years that have followed. I remember it when I ascend my pulpit--I have a living now--and look down upon the best people sitting beneath me pew after pew, generous and contented, upon the worse people, crowded in the aisles, upon the whiskered tenors of the choir, and the high-browed curates and the church-wardens fingering their bags, and the supercilious vergers who turn late comers from the door. I remember it also when I sit in my comfortable bachelor refectory, amidst the carpet slippers that good young ladies have worked for me, and the oak brackets that have been carved for me by good young men; amidst my phalanx of presentation teapots and my illuminated testimonials and all the other offerings of people who believe that I have given them a helping hand, and who really have helped me out of the mire themselves. And though I try to communicate that joy to others--as I try to communicate anything else that seems good--and though I sometimes succeed, yet I can tell no one exactly how it came to me. For if I breathed one word of that, my present life, so agreeable and profitable, would come to an end, my congregation would depart, and so should I, and instead of being an



asset to my parish, I might find myself an expense to the nation. Therefore in the place of the lyrical and rhetorical treatment, so suitable to the subject, so congenial to my profession, I have been forced to use the unworthy medium of a narrative, and to delude you by declaring that this is a short story, suitable for reading in the train.

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*Renoir youth, Metropolitan Museum, Internet Archive*

## **GOD SEES THE TRUTH, BUT WAITS**

BY LEO N. TOLSTOY

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of  
*Best Russian Short Stories*, by Various

In the town of Vladimir lived a young merchant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksionov. He had two shops and a house of his own.

Aksionov was a handsome, fair-haired, curly-headed fellow, full of fun, and very fond of singing. When quite a young man he had been given to drink, and was riotous when he had had too much; but after he married he gave up drinking, except now and then.

One summer Aksionov was going to the Nizhny Fair, and as he bade good-bye to his family, his wife said to him, "Ivan Dmitrich, do not

start to-day; I have had a bad dream about you."

Aksionov laughed, and said, "You are afraid that when I get to the fair I shall go on a spree."

His wife replied: "I do not know what I am afraid of; all I know is that I had a bad dream. I dreamt you returned from the town, and when you took off your cap I saw that your hair was quite grey."

Aksionov laughed. "That's a lucky sign," said he. "See if I don't sell out all my goods, and bring you some presents from the fair."

So he said good-bye to his family, and drove away.

When he had travelled half-way, he met a merchant whom he knew, and they put up at the same inn for the night. They had some tea together, and then went to bed in adjoining rooms.

It was not Aksionov's habit to sleep late, and, wishing to travel while it was still cool, he aroused his driver before dawn, and told him to put in the horses.

Then he made his way across to the landlord of the inn (who lived in a cottage at the back), paid his bill, and continued his journey.

When he had gone about twenty-five miles, he stopped for the horses to be fed. Aksionov rested awhile in the passage of the inn, then he stepped out into the porch, and, ordering a samovar to be heated, got out his guitar and began to play.

Suddenly a troika drove up with tinkling bells and an official alighted, followed by two soldiers. He came to Aksionov and began to question him, asking him who he was and whence he came. Aksionov answered him fully, and said, "Won't you have some tea with me?" But the official went on cross-questioning him and asking him. "Where did you spend last night? Were you alone, or with a fellow-merchant? Did you see the other merchant this morning? Why did you leave the inn before dawn?"

Aksionov wondered why he was asked all these questions, but he described all that had happened, and then added, "Why do you cross-question me as if I were a thief or a robber? I am travelling on business of my own, and there is no need to question me."

Then the official, calling the soldiers, said, "I am the police-officer of this district, and I question you because the merchant with whom you spent last night has been found with his throat cut. We must search your things."

They entered the house. The soldiers and the police-officer unstrapped

Aksionov's luggage and searched it. Suddenly the officer drew a knife out of a bag, crying, "Whose knife is this?"

Aksionov looked, and seeing a blood-stained knife taken from his bag, he was frightened.

"How is it there is blood on this knife?"

Aksionov tried to answer, but could hardly utter a word, and only stammered: "I--don't know--not mine." Then the police-officer said: "This morning the merchant was found in bed with his throat cut. You are the only person who could have done it. The house was locked from inside, and no one else was there. Here is this blood-stained knife in your bag and your face and manner betray you! Tell me how you killed him, and how much money you stole?"

Aksionov swore he had not done it; that he had not seen the merchant after they had had tea together; that he had no money except eight thousand rubles of his own, and that the knife was not his. But his voice was broken, his face pale, and he trembled with fear as though he went guilty.

The police-officer ordered the soldiers to bind Aksionov and to put him in the cart. As they tied his feet together and flung him into the cart, Aksionov crossed himself and wept. His money and goods were taken from him, and he was sent to the nearest town and imprisoned there. Enquiries as to his character were made in Vladimir. The merchants and other inhabitants of that town said that in former days he used to drink and waste his time, but that he was a good man. Then the trial came on: he was charged with murdering a merchant from Ryazan, and robbing him of twenty thousand rubles.

His wife was in despair, and did not know what to believe. Her children were all quite small; one was a baby at her breast. Taking them all with her, she went to the town where her husband was in jail. At first she was not allowed to see him; but after much begging, she obtained permission from the officials, and was taken to him. When she saw her husband in prison-dress and in chains, shut up with thieves and criminals, she fell down, and did not come to her senses for a long time. Then she drew her children to her, and sat down near him. She told him of things at home, and asked about what had happened to him. He told her all, and she asked, "What can we do now?"

"We must petition the Czar not to let an innocent man perish."

His wife told him that she had sent a petition to the Czar, but it had not been accepted.

Aksionov did not reply, but only looked downcast.

Then his wife said, "It was not for nothing I dreamt your hair had turned grey. You remember? You should not have started that day." And passing her fingers through his hair, she said: "Vanya dearest, tell your wife the truth; was it not you who did it?"

"So you, too, suspect me!" said Aksionov, and, hiding his face in his hands, he began to weep. Then a soldier came to say that the wife and children must go away; and Aksionov said good-bye to his family for the last time.

When they were gone, Aksionov recalled what had been said, and when he remembered that his wife also had suspected him, he said to himself, "It seems that only God can know the truth; it is to Him alone we must appeal, and from Him alone expect mercy."

And Aksionov wrote no more petitions; gave up all hope, and only prayed to God.

Aksionov was condemned to be flogged and sent to the mines. So he was flogged with a knot, and when the wounds made by the knot were healed, he was driven to Siberia with other convicts.

For twenty-six years Aksionov lived as a convict in Siberia. His hair turned white as snow, and his beard grew long, thin, and grey. All his mirth went; he stooped; he walked slowly, spoke little, and never laughed, but he often prayed.

In prison Aksionov learnt to make boots, and earned a little money, with which he bought The Lives of the Saints. He read this book when there was light enough in the prison; and on Sundays in the prison-church he read the lessons and sang in the choir; for his voice was still good.

The prison authorities liked Aksionov for his meekness, and his fellow-prisoners respected him: they called him "Grandfather," and "The Saint." When they wanted to petition the prison authorities about anything, they always made Aksionov their spokesman, and when there were quarrels among the prisoners they came to him to put things right, and to judge the matter.

No news reached Aksionov from his home, and he did not even know if his wife and children were still alive.

One day a fresh gang of convicts came to the prison. In the evening the old prisoners collected round the new ones and asked them what towns or villages they came from, and what they were sentenced for. Among the rest Aksionov sat down near the newcomers, and listened with downcast air to what was said.

One of the new convicts, a tall, strong man of sixty, with a

closely-cropped grey beard, was telling the others what he had been arrested for.

"Well, friends," he said, "I only took a horse that was tied to a sledge, and I was arrested and accused of stealing. I said I had only taken it to get home quicker, and had then let it go; besides, the driver was a personal friend of mine. So I said, 'It's all right.' 'No,' said they, 'you stole it.' But how or where I stole it they could not say. I once really did something wrong, and ought by rights to have come here long ago, but that time I was not found out. Now I have been sent here for nothing at all... Eh, but it's lies I'm telling you; I've been to Siberia before, but I did not stay long."

"Where are you from?" asked some one.

"From Vladimir. My family are of that town. My name is Makar, and they also call me Semyonich."

Aksionov raised his head and said: "Tell me, Semyonich, do you know anything of the merchants Aksionov of Vladimir? Are they still alive?"

"Know them? Of course I do. The Aksionovs are rich, though their father is in Siberia: a sinner like ourselves, it seems! As for you, Gran'dad, how did you come here?"

Aksionov did not like to speak of his misfortune. He only sighed, and said, "For my sins I have been in prison these twenty-six years."

"What sins?" asked Makar Semyonich.

But Aksionov only said, "Well, well--I must have deserved it!" He would have said no more, but his companions told the newcomers how Aksionov came to be in Siberia; how some one had killed a merchant, and had put the knife among Aksionov's things, and Aksionov had been unjustly condemned.

When Makar Semyonich heard this, he looked at Aksionov, slapped his own knee, and exclaimed, "Well, this is wonderful! Really wonderful! But how old you've grown, Gran'dad!"

The others asked him why he was so surprised, and where he had seen Aksionov before; but Makar Semyonich did not reply. He only said: "It's wonderful that we should meet here, lads!"

These words made Aksionov wonder whether this man knew who had killed the merchant; so he said, "Perhaps, Semyonich, you have heard of that affair, or maybe you've seen me before?"

"How could I help hearing? The world's full of rumours. But it's a long time ago, and I've forgotten what I heard."

"Perhaps you heard who killed the merchant?" asked Aksionov.

Makar Semyonich laughed, and replied: "It must have been him in whose bag the knife was found! If some one else hid the knife there, 'He's not a thief till he's caught,' as the saying is. How could any one put a knife into your bag while it was under your head? It would surely have woke you up."

When Aksionov heard these words, he felt sure this was the man who had killed the merchant. He rose and went away. All that night Aksionov lay awake. He felt terribly unhappy, and all sorts of images rose in his mind. There was the image of his wife as she was when he parted from her to go to the fair. He saw her as if she were present; her face and her eyes rose before him; he heard her speak and laugh. Then he saw his children, quite little, as they were at that time: one with a little cloak on, another at his mother's breast. And then he remembered himself as he used to be young and merry. He remembered how he sat playing the guitar in the porch of the inn where he was arrested, and how free from care he had been. He saw, in his mind, the place where he was flogged, the executioner, and the people standing around; the chains, the convicts, all the twenty-six years of his prison life, and his premature old age. The thought of it all made him so wretched that he was ready to kill himself.

"And it's all that villain's doing!" thought Aksionov. And his anger was so great against Makar Semyonich that he longed for vengeance, even if he himself should perish for it. He kept repeating prayers all night, but could get no peace. During the day he did not go near Makar Semyonich, nor even look at him.

A fortnight passed in this way. Aksionov could not sleep at night, and was so miserable that he did not know what to do.

One night as he was walking about the prison he noticed some earth that came rolling out from under one of the shelves on which the prisoners slept. He stopped to see what it was. Suddenly Makar Semyonich crept out from under the shelf, and looked up at Aksionov with frightened face. Aksionov tried to pass without looking at him, but Makar seized his hand and told him that he had dug a hole under the wall, getting rid of the earth by putting it into his high-boots, and emptying it out every day on the road when the prisoners were driven to their work.

"Just you keep quiet, old man, and you shall get out too. If you blab, they'll flog the life out of me, but I will kill you first."

Aksionov trembled with anger as he looked at his enemy. He drew his hand away, saying, "I have no wish to escape, and you have no need to kill me; you killed me long ago! As to telling of you--I may do so or

not, as God shall direct."

Next day, when the convicts were led out to work, the convoy soldiers noticed that one or other of the prisoners emptied some earth out of his boots. The prison was searched and the tunnel found. The Governor came and questioned all the prisoners to find out who had dug the hole. They all denied any knowledge of it. Those who knew would not betray Makar Semyonich, knowing he would be flogged almost to death. At last the Governor turned to Aksionov whom he knew to be a just man, and said:

"You are a truthful old man; tell me, before God, who dug the hole?"

Makar Semyonich stood as if he were quite unconcerned, looking at the Governor and not so much as glancing at Aksionov. Aksionov's lips and hands trembled, and for a long time he could not utter a word. He thought, "Why should I screen him who ruined my life? Let him pay for what I have suffered. But if I tell, they will probably flog the life out of him, and maybe I suspect him wrongly. And, after all, what good would it be to me?"

"Well, old man," repeated the Governor, "tell me the truth: who has been digging under the wall?"

Aksionov glanced at Makar Semyonich, and said, "I cannot say, your honour. It is not God's will that I should tell! Do what you like with me; I am in your hands."

However much the Governor tried, Aksionov would say no more, and so the matter had to be left.

That night, when Aksionov was lying on his bed and just beginning to doze, some one came quietly and sat down on his bed. He peered through the darkness and recognised Makar.

"What more do you want of me?" asked Aksionov. "Why have you come here?"

Makar Semyonich was silent. So Aksionov sat up and said, "What do you want? Go away, or I will call the guard!"

Makar Semyonich bent close over Aksionov, and whispered, "Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!"

"What for?" asked Aksionov.

"It was I who killed the merchant and hid the knife among your things. I meant to kill you too, but I heard a noise outside, so I hid the knife in your bag and escaped out of the window."

Aksionov was silent, and did not know what to say. Makar Semyonich slid off the bed-shelf and knelt upon the ground. "Ivan Dmitrich," said he, "forgive me! For the love of God, forgive me! I will confess that it was I who killed the merchant, and you will be released and can go to your home."

"It is easy for you to talk," said Aksionov, "but I have suffered for you these twenty-six years. Where could I go to now?... My wife is dead, and my children have forgotten me. I have nowhere to go..."

Makar Semyonich did not rise, but beat his head on the floor. "Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!" he cried. "When they flogged me with the knot it was not so hard to bear as it is to see you now ... yet you had pity on me, and did not tell. For Christ's sake forgive me, wretch that I am!" And he began to sob.

When Aksionov heard him sobbing he, too, began to weep. "God will forgive you!" said he. "Maybe I am a hundred times worse than you." And at these words his heart grew light, and the longing for home left him. He no longer had any desire to leave the prison, but only hoped for his last hour to come.

In spite of what Aksionov had said, Makar Semyonich confessed his guilt. But when the order for his release came, Aksionov was already dead.

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## **CRUELITAS.**

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*Back o' the Moon*, by Oliver Onions

Even the occasional airs that strayed on the hills did not touch Horwick Town, which lay sweltering. Orders had gone forth from the constables that water was to be used with economy, and garbage cooked in the unswilled kennels. Dogs were kept on the chain for fear of rabies; roof-chambers became stoves, bull's-eye windows burning-glasses; dust rose heavily when it was stirred, and fell again in the same place; duckponds were basins of cracked earth; the very blue of the sky had paled before the devouring sun.

The blinds of John Emmason's dining-room were drawn, and the magistrate had knotted the four corners of a handkerchief over his head; it gave a tipsy appearance to his solemn horse-face. Again Moon and Eastwood had called on him, and Eastwood had removed his neckband, while from the merchant's nose the skin had peeled like a flowering grass. The magistrate's hand held an official document, and his manner was unusually humble.



"And you don't know what it consists of?" Moon said, breaking a long and brooding silence.

"No," the magistrate replied; "he only says, 'New evidence, calling for a fresh trial.' Here's his letter: 'William Chamberlayne, Solicitor to His Majesty's Mint, and also the Solicitor for the Crown'--hum, hum--'make oath and declare that a fresh discovery is likely soon to be made which will furnish the Crown with sure and certain evidence'--hum, hum, and so forth. No, I don't know what it is."

"What d'ye think it is?" Moon demanded.

"Ah, Matthew, it is not always expedient to tell all you think----"

"The devil take your slippery answers! D'ye think they're as good as hanged?"

The magistrate was silent.

"And when will this new trial be?"

"Any day," said Emmason, battling with his wounded dignity; and Moon turned to Eastwood.

"Who can we send?" he asked abruptly.

"Best send John Raikes. Fit him up wi' pigeons and let him get off to-day. I'll see the clogger."

"And for the other tomfoolery, pretending to search premises: Cope has a warrant?"

"Hm! Ay, he has a warrant," Eastwood said, with a shrug.

"So ye're wakening up, are ye?" Moon grunted; and the tipsy tassels of the magistrate's handkerchief shook as he nodded, as if he himself had been addressed.

"As for seeing Parker again," he said, in a subdued voice, "I might as well sit where I am. I am bound to say it looks as if I was discredited, and I have thought of handing in my commission. Parker knows more than I. Even this"--he tapped the document--"even this I only received in common with every other magistrate in the Riding."

"God be thanked for a plain word from ye at last!" Moon said bitterly. "Can ye talk any more in that fashion?"

"There's little else to say," the humiliated magistrate replied. "If it would serve any end now to add my testimony against Northrop and

Haigh--for they're both dead as clay, I fear----

Moon bent his narrow brows on him.

"That'll do," he said; "now hold your tongue.... James, if you can come with me we'll fit John up for money. We're not beat because Emmason's frightened. There's chances. Juries aren't so ready to convict now for these half-crown matters when it's a man's neck; and Raikes knows his way about. Come. We've only two words to say to the lads, and the safest place for Cope will be his own bed. Come.--Don't you go adding testimony, Emmason. Good day."

They passed out into the glaring street, and that same afternoon John Raikes, with half a dozen pigeons in a cage, set off on horseback for York.

Cope was no longer a jest. Even that merry soul, Cole the clogger, had ceased to button his coat over his arms and to slip the clogs on his hands, and only the magpie continued from habit to whistle "Hey, Johnny Cope," when the supervisor's toddling steps sounded down the croft. The reiterated "Good morning--morning, morning, morning," was returned shortly and without merriment; and Cole declared that he could have flung a clog-sole at the man only for his jarring laugh. Somebody had called the supervisor "the nail i' the stocks"--an expression from the fulling-mill, where, should a nail get into the trough where the heavy stampers pounded the wet cloth, the whole work was rent--and the nickname stuck.

And, as if he had now less to conceal, Cope, too, bore himself differently. At any rate, if he still used the "Mr." in addressing even a weaver, and his "hn, hn" was no less insinuating than before, he was differently interpreted, and an indefinable truculence was read into his actions. He even went a little further; for a young lad, grown bold, sang out one day in the market-place (as he had done a hundred times before), "Hey, Johnny Cope!" But this time Cope stepped to him, laughed a vicious little laugh, and took him a smart cut over the calves with his cane, passing on with his head over his shoulder, while the dumbfounded lad whimpered and rubbed his wealed calves. A man standing by remarked, as if on a point of general discipline: "Serve him right;" but the significance of the incident did not pass unnoticed.

Cicely was with Sally again, and Monjoy still passed his nights elsewhere than in Horwick. It was to Monjoy, during one of these intervals in his labour, that Cope revealed a little more of what was in his mind. They had sat next to one another at the "Pipes" (where Cope still called frequently, and always for his single glass of weak brandy and water); and suddenly Cope, leaning towards Monjoy, said, "A word with you, Mr. Monjoy.... I am granted a search-warrant, on suspicion of I know not exactly what, over your new house up the Fullergate--hn, hn! You know as much of it as I, belike, for I may say it was forced on me;

but my duty, hn!--I should have been happy to wink at it, but when magistrates become aware--hn! So at your convenience, eh?"

He scarcely took the trouble to put contempt into his tone, contempt for their childish machinating, and Monjoy gave an embarrassed laugh. "Nay, what the devil's this?" he exclaimed; and Cope peered at him, again patted the air mockingly, and gave the engraver the "La, Mr. Monjoy!" which he seemed to reserve especially for him.

"Ay, Emmason can hand in his commission as soon as he likes," was Matthew Moon's comment when this was reported to him; and even Monjoy seemed unusually contemplative. But John Raikes was to be trusted, and money could be raised at a word.

A rumour, too, of whatever nature, must have penetrated to Back o' th' Mooin, for there arrived from that quarter something that could only be regarded as a message for Jeremy Cope.

Among other pretensions of this puerile, dangerous folk was one that their territory was theirs to the uttermost title, and that even right of passage along the Causeway was by their permission. A Back o' th' Mooiner would watch a stranger pass as you might good-humouredly sanction a trespass. Now to maintain such a right against the inroads of custom you have to refuse the privilege from time to time, and that was exactly what Back o' th' Mooin did one day to two men who had come up out of Lancashire.

A score of the roughest of them--they were carrying heavy timbers from over Booth way--came upon these two men and bade them turn. Monjoy was in Horwick. The men pleaded urgency of affairs; they refused to hear them; they must go back till midnight. One of them (he must have been an irascible fellow) showed a disposition for fight, and a consultation was held on the spot. The name of Cope was mentioned, and at the whispered speech of one of them--it was Mish Murgatroyd--a guffaw broke forth.

"Eh, that wad be a rare hint!" they cried, and they turned to the men, saying, "Ay, ye can go forward, but bide a bit." A man set off at a run back to Booth, and when he returned it was with a bucket of pitch. They stripped the travellers to their boots and shirts, and when they had pitched them they cried, "Off wi' ye; your clothes'll be put at th' top o' Wadsworth Scout at midnight to-night. Gi'e 'em our love i' Horwick."

Some Wadsworth men found them that night, lying in the heather in the moonlight, waiting for their clothes.

And the odd thing was that when the tale got about Horwick none seemed to enjoy the jocularly of it so much as Cope himself. He heard it in the "Cross Pipes," and he chuckled and smothered with laughter till his black-rimmed glasses were dim with his tears. "Rare fellows, rare fellows!" he wheezed; and the company, who had looked to see him take it

differently, watched him warily.

"Rare fellows!" he said, rubbing his glasses. "I remember, Mr. Monjoy, something you once said about law and custom; may I take this as part of your--shall I say sovereignty?"

"No, you may not," said Monjoy curtly.

"Hn, hn!--Now I don't know whether you do me the honour to remember, gentlemen, my story of Hawley's spy? I believe I omitted to say (quite a coincidence) that they brought him in tarred, too----"

The hand of a man across the parlour made a movement to a heavy earthenware jug; the hand was Matthew Moon's. Cope blinked askew at him, and he set the jug down again. The supervisor set his spectacles with great exactness on the bridge of his nose again, made the foolish familiar movement with his hand (but this time towards the merchant), and said: "A violent temper?... La, Mr. Moon!"

Again, this happened a couple of days afterwards. The supervisor came out of his house that morning and was passing, with his customary greeting, down the croft. As he did so, Cole's magpie fell to whistling to his short step the song of "Hey, Johnny Cope." Cope stopped short, put his hand to his ear, and then deliberately walked back. He descended the narrow well of the clogger's doorway, adjusted his spectacles, and craned his head forward towards the bird in the cage.

"Your bird, Mr. Cole?"

"Ay--ay--he's mine," the clogger replied timorously; the exciseman had never before entered his shop.

"Extraordinarily imitative creatures," Cope observed, putting his hand to the door of the cage.

"See he doesn't bite ye," the clogger said tremulously.

"Eh?" said the exciseman sharply; and then, glancing malevolently over his shoulder at the clogger, and showing his corner teeth like a dog, he seized the bird with a quick movement. "Some folk, however, cannot abide them," he said. He drew the bird out, calmly wrung its neck, and flung the still palpitating body on the bench. Then he stepped to the door, mounted the steps, and turned.

"Good morning, Mr. Cole," he said, and passed again down the croft.

A pigeon, homing to Pim o' Cuddy at Wadsworth, carried a message that John Raikes had arrived in York, but brought no further news. Cope was now shunned by many, and the clogger contrived to dodge out of his sight whenever he passed. After the incident of the magpie, it began to go

about that he was not a man, but a devil and a ghoul; nevertheless, he avoided none, and he was to be seen wherever men met for ale and talk and tobacco. As if a contagion emanated from him, he was allowed a corner to himself at the "Cross Pipes"; and the next thing was that he ceased to visit the "Pipes." That came about in this way.

Little was now said openly about the two men incarcerated in York Castle; but as if an imp pushed him to it, Cope himself seemed unable to keep his tongue off it. It chanced that somebody's wain-pole had cracked (or it might have been a loom-timber), and a smith had made an iron collar to shrink over the split portion. The smith, sitting in the inn and toying with the ring as he talked, had set it over his wrist like a bracelet; and all at once Matthew Moon took his wrist, removed the fetter, handed it back to him, and bade him keep it in his pocket. Then, looking up, he caught Cope's eye. The exciseman smiled.

"I think you and I were thinking the same thing, Mr. Moon," he said.

The merchant blazed up suddenly and passionately.

"God send me better thoughts than yours!" he cried.

"Why," the dwarf remarked, "I was thinking of the pleasure of scratching your leg when you get them off again----"

But Moon waited for no more. He sprang to his feet, his hand raised to strike, and his face black with anger.

"Ye'll not be warned, ye fool?" he cried in a breaking voice.

There was no question of Cope's physical courage. The merchant could have crushed him, and every man seemed disturbed to find himself so far out of his reckoning. Instead of showing fear, Cope covered, bathed, enveloped the merchant in one baleful look, and said in an even voice, "Sit down." The door opened, and Sally Northrop stood in the entry.

"What's to do?" she cried; and Matthew's eyes came slowly round to her. His hand fell, and he moved slowly backward to his seat.

"Nothing, Sally--get you gone--nobody wants anything--shut the door."

She stood puzzled for a moment, then left, closing the door behind her. Moon leaned forward, both hands on the arms of his chair, and knit his brows at Cope.

"That's the last," he said. "Come the next, and I'll serve you as they serve magpies."

Cope wagged his heavy head slowly. "I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Moon," he remarked.

"I've now finished speech wi' you," said the merchant with a dark look.

And for reply to that, Cope spat into the empty hearth.

Cicely became aware of awkward silences in Sally's presence and of mournful looks that passed behind her back, and these things filled her with a nameless trouble and apprehension. When Arthur returned to Horwick for his two days (for his spells over the moor were now doubled), her manner became wheedling and cajoling; and one night, putting her arms about him, she sought again to draw from him that which during the day he had refused to tell her.

"Where's John Raikes gone?" she whispered in his ear.

"Isn't he at home?"

"You know he isn't. Where's he gone, dear?"

"Hush, lassie; go to sleep."

"Where's he gone, dear?"

"Gathering turtle-feathers; you'll wake Sally."

But her arms were about his neck. "Do you think I can't keep counsel?" she pleaded. "Tell me, Arthur, or I shall guess worse than there is; tell me, dear...."

He could not but yield; he told her the little he knew. She lay very still by his side, and after a long time she said in a low voice:

"I saw Ellah to-day."

"He's about, is he?"

"With a stick."

"Where was he--here?"

"No; he goes to the 'Fullers' now."

"He's a lucky man, if he but knew it. Now, darling, go to sleep, and don't lie awake fretting for Sally. Promise me----"

"I'll try," she said.

But she lay awake long after he slept soundly, and the perturbation of her thoughts showed in her manner during the days that followed. She sang over and over again the songs she knew, singing upstairs,

downstairs and about, dreading to be silent for a minute; and at night she went to bed tired out, and sometimes had to lie down for an hour during the afternoon, exhausted with this forcing of her spirits.--“Whisht, ye puss!” Sally would say, kissing her or making believe to chastise her hands and wrists. “Whisht, or I’ll send for Dooina now!” and Cicely, thankful that her restlessness was thus set down, would embrace her passionately and pray that Sally might not be aware of the tears that fell sometimes on her hair. Sally would make confidences, too, which harrowed Cicely; even this acted happiness of her friend would sometimes bring a quick sadness into Sally’s eyes; and then Cicely would hurriedly set about some occupation, making work for herself, and singing again. Thus passed a fortnight of the blazing midsummer.

Ellah was about again, but pitifully changed. Folk turned to watch him as he passed--it was not known how he had come by his accident, save that he had fallen down the Scout--and they said that even yet he would be better at home than limping about Horwick, let alone the expense, for he stayed now at the “Fullers’ Arms.” His left hand dangled helplessly before his breast, an idiot gesture, and his right shook and wavered as he supported himself with a stick. His former dread of open spaces was now become so exaggerated that he would not venture into the market-place nor scarce cross even a narrow street; and he hobbled along close to walls, going thrice the distance rather than venture beyond the gutter. He said he felt easier so. On one foot he wore a felt slipper; and folk said that he was lucky to have got off with his wits only a little worse muddled than before.

Since Matthew Moon’s menace, Cope also had made the “Fullers’” his calling-place. The house had a humbler following than Jim Northrop’s inn, and the landlord made ends meet by weaving in a room upstairs. If here again Cope was not made over-welcome, he now seemed to enjoy that rather than otherwise. They had so entirely ceased to despise him that there was silence at a snap of his finger; he led the conversation when he would; and he did this sometimes in a manner that left them little appetite for their ale. They were not squeamish in the “Fullers’,” but Cope dealt in inhuman things, not simply wounds, maimings, and the like, but other and unspeakable things, and with a glee such as a devil might have displayed. The landlord knew that Cope’s custom cost him a good deal more than it was worth, but he dared not for his life have spoken.

One night Cope fairly emptied the room. Ellah, who had not heard his words, alone remained. The landlord had come in, and was ruefully gathering up the half-emptied, abandoned mugs, and he was passing out with his hands full of these when Cope called him sharply.

“Yes, sir?” he said, almost whimpering--for he, too, had heard.

“So you’re another of ’em, eh? Hn! hn! hn! hn!... Now I wonder if you can tell me something I’ll ask you?”

"No, sir," the landlord almost sobbed, as if he were already asked it.

"Quiet, you fool! It is this: Their chests go purple, exactly as I described (don't sob, landlord), and a man with a fat and puffy neck (which is what I was describing when our friend the clogger was struck all of a heap) ... well, well, it is so; and when it isn't asphyxia it's apoplexy, and may be both. With the windpipe partly ossified--(by the way, I haven't seen our other friend for some time)--with the windpipe partly ossified, which I could determine by an examination with my fingers, thus----" He shot out his hand as if to clutch the landlord's throat.

"For the love o' God, don't, sir!" the landlord screamed, falling back; and Cope sniggered.

"Hn! hn! hn! hn! hn!... Very well; and now to my question." His voice changed almost to a snarl. "Why," he demanded, "when the thing itself is at their doors, will the rascals blench at the name of it? I think their necks are stouter than their stomachs! My God, what fools!--Curse 'em in London; they told me there was work for a man here, and what do I find? Monjoy with his porridge-brains at the head of it, and the others.... I had hopes of your merchant at first; but, bah! a passionate child! Not a man worth my while among 'em; I might have begun as you see me now.... Off with you, you slaving rascal; shog off, knock-knees! Off!----"

Perhaps his obscene triumph of earlier in the evening had emboldened him, or more likely he spoke now also of design. He finished his glass, sent it rolling across the table, nibbed his hands together under Ellah's nose, and cried, "Come, good Ellah, come, my new bosom comrade! Keep to the wall--that's it--now a rub against the door-jamb and creep into your own shadow--excellent! Curse it, your gait's after my own heart, dodging round corners and nosing along the kennels--hn! hn! hn! Take my arm...."

They passed out, Ellah leaning on the supervisor.

Two days later there came a word that drove all else from men's minds: All was ready at last at the Slack. There were vague rumours of ceremonies and rites to be observed, as if, instead of two furnaces set up in defiance of the laws of the land, two altars were to be consecrated. The obtaining of fuel (it was said) still remained a difficulty, but one thing at a time; that would be solved by and by, and there was to be no further delaying of the inauguration. Monjoy had been in Horwick for a couple of days; at nine o'clock of a July evening he climbed the Scout and strode along the Causeway. It was a serene and burning sunset, and the purple of the heather was turned to a rich low gold. Sheep called from hill to hill, and from time to time grouse rose and fled. Slowly the sun went down, turning the moor to ink; the moon would not rise till midnight; and only the grey Causeway seemed of



itself to retain some dim glimmer of day. That, too, died down; the night became still and sultry; and Big Monjoy continued to stride towards the Slack long after the immense moor had become a thronging together of shadows and darkness.

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## **DARK DAWN**

By Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym Keith Hammond.

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*Blinded by an atomic blast, Dan Gresham  
joins forces with the radiant Swimmers  
to preserve an undersea civilization!*

The *Albacore* was eight hundred miles out of Suva, feeling her way through the Pacific toward a destination unmarked except on the charts. She was a Navy cruiser jury-rigged into a floating laboratory, Navy manned, but carrying a dozen specialized technicians as passengers.

For days she had waited outside the danger area, till circling planes radioed word that the test atomic blast had apparently subsided. Then the *Albacore* went into a flurry of preparations. It was a miracle that the watch had sighted Gresham in his rubber boat, and a triple miracle that he was alive.

His eyes bandaged, he sat out on deck, while Black, the neurologist, leaned on the rail beside him and stared aft. Presently Black took out a pack of cigarettes, automatically held it out to Gresham, and then remembered that the man was blind.

"Cigarette?" he said.

"Yes, thanks. Is that you, Dr. Black?" Gresham's voice was very low.

"Uh-huh. Here. I was watching that shark. He's followed us from Suva."

"Big one?"

"One of the biggest I ever saw," Black said. "That's the baby who tried to take a chunk out of you when we picked you up. He kept biting at our oars!"

"A pity he didn't get me," Gresham said. He tossed the cigarette away. "No use. If I can't see the smoke, I can't enjoy it."

The neurologist studied his patient.

"We don't know that you're permanently blinded, after all. This is so new."

"I was looking straight at it," Gresham said bitterly. "It must have been miles and miles away, but I could feel it burning my eyes out in one flash. Don't tell me!"

"All right. I won't. But this is a completely new type of atomic blast. It isn't uranium. It's a controlled chain reaction based on an artificial element—there must be new types of radiation involved."

"Fine. The next time there's a war, we can blind everybody." Gresham laughed grimly. "I'll be sorry for myself for a few months, probably. Then I'll get a Seeing-Eye dog and become a useful member of society again. Huh!" He paused. When he spoke again his voice was different, doubtful, as if he didn't quite realize he spoke aloud. "Or maybe not," he said. "Maybe I'll never be—useful—any more. Maybe I'm not just imagining...."

"Imagining?" Black said, interested. "What?"

Gresham jerked his bandaged face away.

"Nothing!" he declared sharply. "Forget it."

Black shrugged. "Tell me about yourself, Gresham," he suggested. "We haven't had much time yet to get acquainted. How did you happen to be out here just now?"

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Gresham shook his head irritably. "Just at the wrong spot and the wrong time? Maybe it was meant that way from the start. Predestination—how do I know? Oh, I had enough after the war. I bummed around the islands. I—like the sea." His voice softened. "Like isn't strong enough. I love the sea. I can't stay away from it. There's a fascination—I signed on here and there as a deck-hand, a stevedore—I didn't care what. I just wanted to soak myself in the big things. Sun and sea and sky. Well, I can still feel the sun and the wind, and I can hear the water. But I can't see it."

There was no real conviction in the way he finished that last sentence. He turned his bandaged eyes a little to Black's left and his face grew strained, as if he were looking at something far out at sea.

"You know about the radar sonics, don't you?" the neurologist said.

"Oh, sure. I'll learn to bounce a radar beam around me and keep from walking into walls. But—" Gresham's voice died. He seemed to be staring as if through the bandages and his own blindness at something far away. In spite of himself Black turned to follow that blinded stare. And at a great distance off he saw, or thought he saw something in the glare of the sun-track splash water and dive....

"Dr. Black," Gresham was saying in that strained, doubtful voice. "Dr. Black, how are you on psychiatry?"

"Why, fair." Black kept the surprise out of his tone with an effort. "Why?"

"Have you noticed any symptoms of—aberration in me?"

"Nothing unusual. Nervous shock, of course. That atomic blast catching you certainly would have caused a strain."

Gresham said, "After the blast went off I floated for I don't know how long before you picked me up. I—started to imagine things. Delirium, you could say. But I don't know. I—forget it, will you? Maybe later I'll feel like talking. Just forget I said anything, Dr. Black."

After all, there was nothing to talk about, to put into coherent words. For what had happened was inexplicable. It was part of the terra incognita that the key of nuclear energy had unlocked.

Even Daniel Gresham, drowsing the years away in his tropical lotuslands, could not help hearing about the new atomic experiments. He had stopped keeping track of time back in 1946, because around the archipelagoes time was a variable, and hours could last for seconds or months, depending on whether you were at a \_kava-kava\_ festival with the golden-skinned Melanesians or simply stretched flat on the warm deck, while white canvas billowed overhead and waves splashed quietly along the keel.

But the radio wouldn't stop talking. It talked about the uranium piles constructed for experiments, and the new lithium hydride methods, and the technicians who were endlessly charting, testing, studying—and finding fresh mysteries always beyond. And this latest test—a completely new type of atomic blast, one that had never existed before on earth, except, perhaps, so long ago that the planet was a white-hot, molten mass.

Briefly, the holocaust had blazed out and vanished. But it had left traces in the instruments planted in the path of the fury, and it had left its trace, too, in an intricate, sensitive instrument cage inside Daniel Gresham's skull.

Thoughts can be measured; they are electric energy. The machine that transmits them can be functionally altered. And, adrift on his raft, Gresham had found a very strange substitute for his lost vision....

The *Albacore's* boat came back with recording instruments from a floating buoy, and Black paced slowly up and down the deck, studying a coil of paper and trying to ignore the piping of sea-birds that flapped overhead, and the look of strained attention on Gresham's face. It didn't belong there, on a blind man's face. Gresham sat as he had sat yesterday, bandaged eyes turned toward the sea beyond the boat as if he could see something out there invisible to ordinary eyes.

"Doctor, what does that look like out there?" he asked suddenly.

Startled, Black followed the direction of his pointing finger.

"Why, a porpoise, I think. It—no, now it's gone." He stared at his patient in amazement. "Gresham, are you still blind?"

Gresham laughed softly. "There's a bandage over my eyes, isn't there? Of course I'm blind."

"Then how did you know about the porpoise?"

"It isn't a porpoise."

\* \* \* \* \*

Black took a long breath. "What the devil's the matter with you, Gresham?" he said.

"I wish I knew. I—" Gresham's voice hesitated. Then he said with a sudden rush, "You could call it hallucination. I can see things. But not with my own eyes."

"Yes?" Black's tone was hushed. He was terribly afraid of interrupting this mood of explanation. "Go on."

"Right now, for example," Gresham said in his soft voice, "I'm seeing this ship, from about half a mile away. I can see the smoke, and the little figures on deck. I can see myself, and you. From a distance. Once in a while a wave blocks my sight. You're holding something white."

Black stared off into the blue distance, where what had seemed a porpoise had broken water once and vanished. He could see nothing but ocean now.

"I told you I started imagining things on the raft," Gresham went on. "I kept seeing things from different angles. I knew I was blind, but there

were flashes ... green vistas ... blue sky and white clouds...."

"Memory. Imagination."

"It isn't a porpoise," Gresham said.

Black made an effort and pulled his mind into better coordination.

"Now listen," he said. "All right. You were in the direct path of some new radiations. These figures—" He rustled the paper in his hand. "They don't check exactly. There was an untyped form of radiation in this area after the atomic blast. But—" He went off at a tangent. "It isn't a porpoise? What is it, then?"

"I don't know. It's intelligent. It's trying to communicate with me."

"Good Heavens!" Black said, genuinely startled now. The look he bent upon Gresham was dubious.

"I know, I know." Gresham must have sensed in the silence that doubtful glance. "Maybe I'm making it all up. I did spot the—porpoise—but maybe my hearing's improved. The rest—well, I haven't got any proof except what I know I've seen—and felt. I tell you, it's something intelligent out there. It's trying to communicate and it can't." He rubbed his forehead above the bandages, his face taking on the old look of strain. "I can't make sense out of it. Too—alien, I guess. But it's trying hard...." Suddenly he laughed. "I can imagine how you're looking at me. Would you like to try some tests, Dr. Black? Knee-jerks, maybe?"

"Come on below with me," Black said briefly. Gresham laughed again and got up....

An hour later they were back on deck. Black looked worried.

"Listen, Gresham," he said earnestly. "I don't know what's happened to you. I admit that. The encephalogram was—puzzling. Your brain emits radiations that don't check with anything we've seen before. Some peculiar things are possible, theoretically. For instance, a radio isn't really likely to pick up transmitted waves, but it does. And telepathy's theoretically possible. Suppose your brain has been altered a little by your exposure to the atomic blast. There are powers latent in the human mind, new senses that we know little about."

"I suppose you have to find new words for it," Gresham said as Black stumbled and paused. "But I don't care what the scientific diagnosis is. I can see again. Not with my own eyes. But I can see."

He was silent for a moment, and to Black it seemed that the blind man's whole face looked rapt, as if he gazed upon things more beautiful than a man with eyes ever saw. When Gresham spoke, his voice was rapt, too.

"I can see!" he repeated, almost to himself. "I don't care what else happens. Something alive and intelligent and—and desperate is near me. I see through its eyes. Its thoughts are too different to understand. It's trying to tell me something, and it can't. I don't care. All I care about is seeing, and the things I see."

He hesitated.

"Beautiful," he murmured. "All my life I've loved beautiful things. That's why you found me out here, in the tropics, away from cities and ugliness. And now!" He laughed a little and his voice changed.

"If I could see your face, I wouldn't be talking this way," he said. "But I can't, so I can say what I feel. Beauty is all that matters, and in a way I'm glad even this has happened, if it means I can go on seeing things like—like this."

"Like what?" Black leaned forward tensely. "Tell me."

Gresham shook his head. "I can't. There aren't any words."

The two men sat silent for awhile, Black frowning and studying the rapt, blind face before him, Gresham staring through his bandages and through the eyes of another being, at things he could not speak of.

Something glistened among the waves, very far away, turned over in the water and sank again.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, Gresham did not awaken. To Black it resembled catalepsy. The man lay quietly, his heart faintly beating, his respiration almost stopped. Once or twice a ripple of motion crossed his features and he grimaced. But that was all. He lay for a long while, half-alive.

But he was double alive, triply—a hundredfold—elsewhere.

Around dawn it began to happen to him, he thought afterward. He felt first a something reaching out for him. His internal vision kept catching glimpses and then snapping shut again like a camera lens. There was a thought, beating against a barrier, trying to get through to him. But it was too alien. It could not reach through.

Gresham's half-sleeping mind could not understand. He reached out into other minds around him, seeking contact. Bird minds—sparks of life rising and falling on the winds, dim, formless bits of cloud. And other small minds, in the waters, vague, weaving through green voids. But in the end he always came back to the Swimmer.

And in the end, the Swimmer must have realized it could not communicate, knew at last there was only one way left. It had to show him what it wanted to tell. And there was only one way to show him.

So it swam down, down in the pearly light of dawn, with the sea and sky an enormous emptiness and the *Albacore* a small dark shape miles away, and Gresham's body hidden within it, asleep, while his mind sank with the Swimmer through the fathomless seas.

Down and down, into the great deeps under the atolls, where abysses lie deeper than Everest is high. The Swimmer could plumb them, for the Swimmer was not human. Intelligent, yes, but—different. Life under the waters would follow a different course from life in the air. And cities under the sea would be very different, too.

Gresham had never known this feeling of bodily freedom before. He shared with the Swimmer the physical sensation of motion in a supporting medium through which he could move freely in any direction. It was a strange, strong body that housed his mind temporarily, but no visual image of it formed.

There were sensations of indescribable difference—a smooth, flowing, muscular thrust that exploded into bursts of action as he drove downward. And an aching, straining discomfort gradually ceased as he sank. The race of the Swimmer was meant to live in the pressure of the deeps, and now the pressure began to fold in comfortingly. Once more the Swimmer's body felt completely its own, and that deep, sensuous pleasure made it take an intricate path downward, as a bird plays in its own element or a dolphin gambols in the waves.

The dark began to close in. But Gresham began to be aware of a new, strange light from below, an unearthly dawn, in a light-band no human eyes could ever see except in this incredible manner. He could never describe the color of the abysmal dawn, a tremendous slow brightening of sunless day permeating the vastness of underseas.

Shadows of the deep water swam past, shapes of terror and mystery and fantastic beauty. Once the leviathan bulk of the great whale went by, and once a goblin picnic of tiny colored lanterns—fish with luminous spots driving in an insanely gay flight before the shadow of a barracuda that swept like death after them.

But the sea-bottom was dark. Perhaps only in some spots was this land of veiled shadows to be found. The immense glow of the submarine dawn drew itself in and focused on small areas as Gresham's mind went downward with the Swimmer. And then a gargantuan black wall, without top or end or bottom, loomed before him.

Perspective swung round dizzily, and Gresham saw that it was no topless

wall, but the bottom of the sea. Crag lifted from it. Atolls and hills jutted into the faint fringes of light, crawling with weeds, blanketed with undersea growth. But the great plain and the valleys were in shadow.

Anchored by glowing ropes that vanished in darkness below, swung latticed spheres of light. There were dozens of them, like shining toy balloons expanding in size as the Swimmer swept nearer and nearer. Across the lattices a troubled whirling ran, shaking vortices of darkness that made the spheres fade and brighten like lanterns, and then pulse into dimness again.

The Swimmer's headlong sweep, like flight through green air, carried Gresham straight toward the nearest globe. Between the lattices an opening like a shutter widened, gaped, closed.

And this was a city of the underseas.

\* \* \* \* \*

For five days Gresham's body lay all but motionless in his bunk on the *Albacore*, while the ship drove forward over fathomless abysses where Gresham's mind moved among mysteries. Dr. Black spent as much time as he could spare beside the cataleptic sleeper, watching the vague shadows of expression that moved now and again across his face—wonder, sometimes revulsion, sometimes strain and dread. But only the shadows of the real emotions which Gresham's mind knew, far away.

On the fifth day he woke.

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Black saw his hands rise quickly to the bandaged eyes, and Gresham sat up abruptly, making an inarticulate sound in his throat. His face for a moment was wild with dismay and horror.

"It's all right," Black said quietly. "It's all right, Gresham. You've been asleep and dreaming, but you're safe now. Wake up!"

"Safe!" Gresham said bitterly. "Blind again, you mean. And—" His face convulsed once in a grimace of revolt; then he had himself under control and his hands which had been clawing futilely at the bandage as if they could pull away blindness from his eyes, fell quietly to the blanket.

"What was it?" Black asked. "You were dreaming? Would you like to tell me?"

It did not come all at once. The story covered many days in fragmentary sessions, but in the end Gresham told.



"You'll find a diagnosis to cover it," he said to Black. "You'll have to decide I'm a schizophrenic—is that the word—and I'm having hallucinations. It doesn't matter to me. I know what happened. There were cities down there...."

He had never known true beauty until he moved with the Swimmer through those incredible floating towns under the water. Our own race, chained by fetters of gravitation to the ground, never knew such wonders. Our bodies have been deformed, unsuccessful adaptations ever since we learned to walk upright. But a species without enslavement to gravity, developing in sheer beauty and sheer freedom, perfectly adapted to their green aqueous world, had come into existence underseas.

"They can build as they like," Gresham said softly. "Gravity doesn't affect them, you see. There were houses—if you could call them houses—made in spirals and coils and spheres. They can float free within the globes if they like. Some of the houses move in orbits. Some of them—oh, I can't tell you. I lived there with them for a long while, but I can't describe them and I can't tell you what the people were like. There aren't words.

"He had to take me down to make me understand what he wanted. The Swimmer, I mean. But his city, like his mind, is too alien to tell about. I can only say it was beautiful, the kind of beauty I've loved all my life and tried to find for years. I'm going back down there, Black."

"Why?" Black had a note-pad on his knee and his pen was moving smoothly across it as Gresham's quiet voice went on. "Tell me about it, Gresham."

"It was the atomic explosion," the blind man said. "The radiations released some sort of balance, away down there, and their machines aren't working as they should any more. That's what caused those whirlpools of darkness in the light and made the lattices around the cities shake. And they need the lattices. They have an enemy down there—another race, or maybe a branch of their own race.

"It's strange to think of wars going on down there just as they have here, and one race enslaving another, as the Swimmer's people did. I thought at first they were—well, call it evil. I saw how they ruled. Evil is a foolish word. The Swimmer people are so beautiful and strong and wild, you can't apply our rules to their lives. I lived among them. I saw that other race, in the dark of the sea-bottom, banished from that wonderful, strange light a human couldn't even see.

"At first I thought it was cruelty that kept the—the others—enslaved. And then I happened to see one of the Others." His voice faltered and a shadow of revulsion crossed the bandaged face. "I saw what was left after a minor uprising, and I saw how the Others kill, and what they look like. After that I knew. If the decision were mine, I'd exterminate

them all. I can't help that feeling. It's instinct. There are things too degenerate to live.

"It's all been going on down there for I don't know how many centuries, how many milleniums. Think of it, Black! Empires rising and falling, races ruling and races enslaved, sciences developing along lines we'll never understand and nobody guessing it until the Swimmer came to the surface.

"His race is intelligent. They must have realized the new radiations and the explosion had come from another intelligent race. They've seen sunken ships and drowned men, they knew we lived here in the air. But they're so alien ... No communication is really possible between us. If it weren't for the accident that did—whatever it did—to my brain, no human might ever have known.

"Well, I'm going back. There's trouble down there. They need help." Gresham paused and laughed harshly. "Why do I keep thinking I can help them? I can't even share their thoughts. All I can do is find some creature to take me down into the depths, so I can see with its eyes. I can watch, if I can't help. I can move through those wonderful cities again, and see the Swimmer's people." His voice faltered and he gave his mind up for an instant to the memory of that race and its beauty and wildness and strange, alien enchantment.

"The Swimmer himself had to stay," Gresham said. "The machines—you'd never guess they were machines to see them—weren't working well. All who could had to help the machines, help to keep the dark race—the Others—away from the cities. So the Swimmer's mind let go of mine and I had to come back."

"What can you do?" Black asked. "Is there any way to get in touch again?"

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Gresham turned his blinded face toward the ocean. He was silent for a moment.

"That shark," he said. "The big one. He's still following us."

Black had to rise and lean over the rail to make sure.

"Yes, I can see him now. He's with us."

"That'll do," Gresham said confidently. "An intelligent mind can control a non-intelligent one for awhile. I'll take the shark's body and go back."

"You're tired, Gresham," Black said. "We can talk about this later. I'm

going to give you a sedative and I want you to rest.”

Gresham laughed. “See that gull up there? What would you say if it circled three times and landed on the rail beside you?”

Black looked up. The gull sailed in one wide circle, two circles, three—and swooped down toward the rail. Its yellow feet gripped and closed and it perched there turning its head from side to side and looking at Black with eyes that fantastically seemed to him for a moment Gresham’s eyes, as if the blind man in the bird’s dim brain looked out and saw him.

Gresham laughed again.

“You’ve got a notebook on your knee,” he said. “You have no idea how queer you look through a bird’s eyes, Black. All out of focus and strange.”

“Let it go,” Black said in a choked voice. The gull tipped forward and spread its wings, its eyes going blank again with mindless bird-thoughts.

“Yes,” Gresham said. “The shark will do....”

Black sat beside the bunk and watched the sleeping face of the blind man, his own mind in a turmoil. He could not believe or accept Gresham’s story, but in spite of himself he found images slipping through his brain as he saw emotions flicker across the cataleptic face. He saw the green abysses gliding by, he saw the nameless undersea dawn brightening in the depths, felt the great shark’s body bend its banded muscles and drive on and on toward a city of floating spheres that illuminated the dark like lanterns lighted by no human hands.

Suddenly Gresham sat straight up among the blankets. The blood rushed into his face and he said, “Huh!” in a choked, inarticulate voice.

“Gresham?” Black said, laying a hand on his arm. “Are you awake? What is it?”

He was not awake. He did not turn his head or feel the hand or hear the voice. All his faculties were focused on something very far away, deep down in the abysses beneath the boat. He was like a man in a nightmare. His breath came fast now, through bared teeth, and his face convulsed into the lines of a man fighting for his life.

“The dark!” he said thickly. “The dark! Where did the lattices go? What’s wrong? Oh, what’s happening here?” But that was the last articulate speech he made, and the last words Black had time to hear, for suddenly Gresham began to struggle violently with the blankets, striving to throw them off, lashing out with clenched fists whenever

Black tried to hold him.

In the end they had to strap him to the bunk to keep him from injuring himself and those around him. He lay there struggling furiously, resting in panting silence and then fighting against the restraining bands again. His face was wild with a ferocity that sent cold shivers through Black's mind, a less than human ferocity.

And in the writhing of his body against the straps, in the way it bowed and lashed straight again, and the strangely fluid motions of his struggle, Black tried not to think he saw the movement of a shark's body fighting in deep water against an alien foe.

"Blood!" Gresham muttered, deep in his throat. "Blood—so much blood—can't see, but—there's another—kill, kill! Kill them all!"

And it seemed to Black that the little cabin was dark with the dark of the undersea and blinded with blood that spread through the dim water, and boiling with the terrible combat of an unknown struggle.

He knew to an instant when the shark died. He could tell by the last spasmodic convulsion of Gresham's body on the bed, the double lashing motion and the sudden silence. He even thought he saw for an instant the blankness of death itself flicker across Gresham's face, the brush of it touching the edges of the mind that had controlled the shark's mind.

After that there was only silence, and the slumber of deep exhaustion....

"It was too late," Gresham said. His voice was a whisper, hoarse from the shouting he had done through his nightmare. His body was bruised from struggling against the straps, and his mind was sick and tired.

"It must have been too late from the moment the explosion went off, if anyone had known. But they still hoped. They sent the Swimmer up and they brought me down, hoping until the last I could do something." He laughed briefly, a croaking sound in his raw throat. "I might have known it was too wonderful to last. The cities and the people—they were never meant for human eyes to see. I was lucky to get even the one glimpse I had. And maybe it's just as well. The two cultures never could have met. If there were any way for humans to reach them, we'd only have destroyed their culture as we've destroyed everything else that's beautiful. As we'll destroy ourselves, when the time comes.

"We did destroy them, Black. The explosion did it. And maybe this was the best way, quick enough, after all."

"But what was it? What happened?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The face beneath the bandages was grim.

"I went down with the shark. I could see from a long way off that something had gone wrong. Only a few of the cities were lighted, and one of them flickered out as we came near. And in the underwater dawn-light I could see black shapes, shambling.

"If it hadn't been for the dark people, the slaves, I think they might have won. They were getting the machines under control again, you see. In the last city the machine might have held out, if the Others hadn't already been in the city.

"I made the shark swim closer, in through one of the dark cities where I'd gone with the Swimmer. Once it was full of lights and spiral dwellings, beautiful, lithe people gliding among the floating orbits of their homes. Now it was dark. I couldn't see much—thank God. But the ... black ... figures shambling through those hollow cities, among the floating bodies of the beautiful dead Swimmers, horrified me." Gresham bit his lip and was silent.

After a while he went on.

"There was still fighting going on around the last lighted place. I made the shark swim into it. I could help, at least, that much.

"The Swimmers fought with curved blades of light that slashed through everything they touched. They were wonderful fighters—terrible and wonderful. I never saw such ferocity and such beauty. But the Others were too many for them." His voice cracked for an instant.

"The Others were foul, degenerate, dark \_things\_," he said, and choked over the words.

"Here, drink this," Black commanded, holding a glass to Gresham's lips. Gresham drank, and rested for a moment.

"That was all," he said presently, in a calmer voice. "I watched it end. I helped as much as I could." He grinned faintly. "It was one of the Swimmers who killed the shark, finally. They didn't understand, of course. They must have thought it was just another of the scavenger fish who were gathering because of the blood. The curved light-blade sheered through it like steel—or fire—fire under water—and the shark died. Well, it was time for me to go, anyhow. I'd done all I could, then. But this isn't the end of it."

"What do you mean?" Black demanded. Then he said quickly, "Never mind. You've got to rest now. You can think it over and tell me later."

"I don't need to think. Remember what I told you when I first saw the

Others? How hateful they are even on first sight? Instinct, Black, sheer instinct tells you to kill them on sight. I—I don't know why, but that's what I'm going to do next." He clenched his fist and struck the blanket lightly.

"Extermination!" he said in his hoarse, strained whisper.  
"Extermination!"

\* \* \* \* \*

A week later the *Albacore* passed a group of tiny islets lying like scattered flowers on the water. Native outriggers came out, as usual, to offer fruit and gossip. Gresham seemed to know them. He talked briefly in Kanaka, and there was much nodding and liquid chatter among the natives. When the outriggers went back, Gresham went with them.

"I know what I want," he told Black as the neurologist helped him over the rail. "I'm all right now, physically. Or as much as I'll ever be. I'm a responsible man—you can stop worrying about me. I've even got enough money put aside for what small needs I'll have from now on. Forget about me, doctor. And thanks—thanks very much."

Doubtfully, and with a touch of strange, illogical envy, Black watched him go.

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The globes that once swung glowing on their cables in the abyss swing dark now. Below them the night land of the sea-bottom stretches far away into a light that shines eternally, a light no human eyes will ever see. Inside the cities which are tombs now, the beautiful bodies of the dwellers float hollow-boned, bare skeletons cleansed by the wandering denizens of the sea. The dead race lies forever entombed in its dead cities.

But a race still lives among them for awhile. A dark, alien race that destroyed its masters and shambles now among the ruins it made. Death lives with that race.

Out of the immense ocean dawn above the ravening sharks come down silently, one by one, to kill and kill—and be killed. And on an island high over them, in the daylight he cannot see, a blind man sits on his beach with his strange sight focused in another world. A world of water and darkness and death.

He is not blind as other men are blind. He has a thousand eyes to see through. He had a vengeance to wreak. Some day that vengeance will be sated, when the last dark shambler dies. After that, Gresham will be content. He will give up his days then to looking at the world again through the strange, small lenses of other brains, and to the memory of

beauty which he once saw so briefly, in the hour of its destruction, and will never see again.

In comparison to the memory of that beauty, all other men are blind.

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